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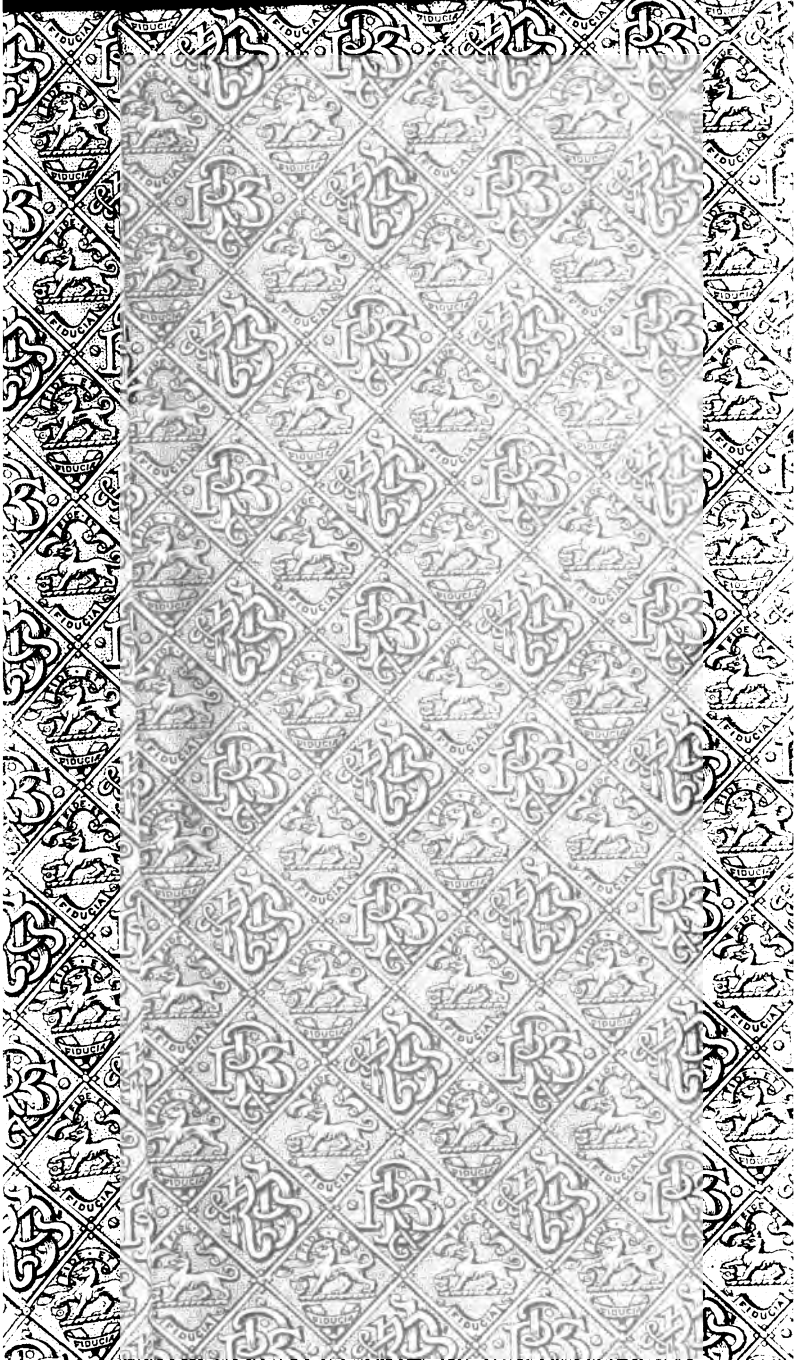
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WESTOVER'S WARD.

WESTOVER'S WARD.

BY

ALGERNON RIDGEWAY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.
1892.

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WESTOVER'S WARD.

CHAPTER I.

WESTOVER did not see Angela Cloud for some days after the escape from the theatre. One afternoon a landau dashed past him as he was walking along Broadway. He looked up in time for her features to gleam upon him for one brief instant, and then she was whirled out of sight. In that one brief instant he recognized her companion also, who was no less a person than the notorious Senator Dowlie. This was a far from pleasing spectacle. He

paused a moment on the spot of pavement where the nimble-footed horses had flashed past him, and then he turned resolutely and walked down the street in the opposite direction. His was no idle stroll; his very back bristled with intention. There was no flaccidness about his limbs, no flabbiness about his poise. There was no superfluous flesh; he was all muscle and sinew. His step was firm, his head alert, his pace swift, and he carried his shoulders as if proud, not of his gentle-manhood, but of his manhood.

"By George! are you going to walk over me, head and all, Westover?" It was Harrison's light-hearted laugh. "Well, what's up? You look for all the world as if your dinner had gone wrong with you, old fellow?"

Westover shook his head. "I have just

seen Angela Cloud drive past in Dowlie's landau."

"No; have you, though? Hasn't that old codger a devil of a taste for a pretty face?" Harrison looked grave. Dowlie was the man a woman should avoid.

"We must strike in and keep her from becoming a victim."

"Certainly," assented Harrison; "but how shall we strike in?"

A scene in a car rushed in upon his memory, and he spoke more cheerfully than he felt. His inspiration had to come direct from lovely woman herself. Talking the matter over quietly with Westover did not heat his blood to the point of action.

A cloud of dust, a clatter of hoofs that set every brick in the pavement to vibrating, gave the lie to this languor of feeling. Forward came Senator Dowlie's

trotting ponies, and behind them Angela Cloud gleamed, a blushing rose of womanhood. She had barely time to lean forward, touch a gloved hand to her lip, and smile radiant pleasure upon them, for the blooded steeds pranced past in the twinkling of her smile.

"Damn the scoundrel!" said Harrison, under his breath; his cheek flushed. "I will go and make love to her myself; I will drive him away; I will——"

"Do nothing of the kind," interposed Westover. "What good would that do?"

"I am ready to make a sacrifice for the poor little girl," began the silly fellow.

"This is a case when a man's interference is worse than useless. If we would accomplish anything, we must work through a woman."

"Woman! What woman?" wondered Harrison.

"Why, nothing more nor less than this. Angela Cloud must have a companion of her own sex."

"She won't agree."

"Of course, not at first."

"What will you do if she insists upon being her own mistress?"

"I will make sure of her consent," returned Westover, confidently, "or I will withdraw my friendship."

"You are right, and I will take sides with you," was Harrison's hearty rejoinder; then a trifle sceptically, "but you are a heap more confident about these soft-skinned creatures like Angela Cloud than I am."

In the evening Westover called on Mrs. Cloud. He found her seated in a rocking-chair, resting after her drive. In her lap nestled a snow-white poodle; its fluffy hair melted into the snow-white of her woollen

gown, so that poodle and lady seemed one. The odour of violet water was a trifle too alcoholic for the finely susceptible nostril; but Angela's chief enjoyment, it must be remembered, like that of the untutored, lay in sensations. Westover was making strange discoveries in the dark continent of egoism; he was beginning to realize that the lives which are intensely tragic are the hopelessly commonplace ones. A man stands at high-water mark in the cause of humanity when he grasps the fact that the half-educated are the wholly prejudiced people, being occupied with apparatus, patent machinery, bricks and mortar, and drainage. When he perceives that this devoteeism to creature-comforts is the cause of the slow progress of human nature; that virtue means strength, that knowledge is worthy only so far as it marks the triumph over obstacles—then,

and then only, does he obtain the Pisgah-sight of Wisdom, and lay his hands upon the white rose of Truth. Do not let us be deceived by function, honorary title, degree. Let us realize that even the girl-graduate in her golden hair, the subject of so many pretty poems, is oftentimes merely a pleasant-looking, pleasantly disposed animal, of a more complex organism and instincts than her riding-horse or her collie; but it is by reason alone, against which matter for ever fights, that we enter the blessed circle of true manhood and true womanhood. Angela Cloud stood far beyond this blessed circle.

"Oh, Mr. Wustover," she cried, when he entered her sitting-room, "how-dy? I'm powerful glad to see you. Get down, sir." She pulled the poodle's ears and tickled his nose in the attempt to dislodge the pet from her lap, but he would not be

dislodged. He merely moved his glistening black nose to another comfortable fold in his mistress's soft robe, lazily winked one pink-rimmed eye, and dozed off again. "Wake up, Petsy, do, there's a lovey. Don't you see, here's Mr. Wustover come. What's he agoing to think o' you, sir?"

It was evident that Petsy was indifferent to Mr. Westover's thoughts of him, for he continued to doze on placidly without so much as stirring his curly, epicurean body. Angela glanced up with a smile. "Isn't he a dear?" Then, without further intimation, she sprang up, gave a shake, and down swung "the dear" with a thud upon the floor, rudely driven from the cosy retreat in her lap. "He won't mind; he'll waddle off to sleep again, see if he don't;" and she was right. A feeble remonstrance, in the shape of two eye-blinks, and he fell fast asleep on the very spot where he had

fallen. "Didn't I tell you so?" said the mistress, proudly. "He's a smart chap; isn't you, Pet?"

"Where did he come from?" asked Westover, indicating the poodle with his finger.

"Senator Dowlie gave him to me; didn't he, Pets?" She stooped, so as to raise the favourite into a more comfortable position, and did not see the frown upon her visitor's brow. "He was awful sorry not to have taken my part when I was going to Durango, that time I first met Mr. Hairison and you. He says he's going to make up for it now, though; isn't he, Pets?" She deposited the head of the canine voluptuary upon a heap of shawls, and turned towards her guest. "He's a sight of tin"—using the pronoun "he" ambiguously—"but for all that he isn't anything by compairing with you or

Mr. Hairison. He's old, and powerful ugly too; he has a wart on his nose, and his lips poke out—so"—she poked out hers in imitation; she was a good mimic, but she made a ludicrous copy of Dowlie's huge posterior lip. "He's a kind old chap, though, 'deed he is. He tries to say nice things, too. He gave me these flowers; he says things about my being like a flower, as if a flower and a girl"—trilling a laugh—"*could* be alike."

Westover watched her in silence while she ran on with heedless verbosity, revealing her poor meagre mind at every turn in the chatter. Her arms showed whiter against the open sleeves of her white wool gown, and she had the nestling movement of a wood-pigeon. She made everything look dark beside her. Westover seemed swarthier, and the amplitude of his cheek and brow were harsh by contrast with her

soft curves. He had the force of a bronze figure. His strength lay in reserve power, in intention of will. Had he lived a century or so earlier, he might have been a law-giver, a martyr, a sage in counsel. He was no reader of human nature, but his mind worked seriously and slowly upon the abstract questions of human life. His motto was that of the great Frederick—"Soffre e Tace." The war had interrupted his education; he had come a generation too late to enjoy the educational advantages which showered upon the better class of men in the South before the war, and yet not late enough to fall heir to the prosperity which had grown up in the South since the war. Like his contemporaries, he had been early driven to work by force of circumstances; through discipline he had become a grave business man instead of a gentle-

man of thoughtful leisure; living sparely, but contributing largely to the maintenance of the home Westovers. Little sunshine had crept into his life, and he had grown to love the shadow.

"Mr. Wustover, do you like flowers?"

Angela gathered together some pale blossoms, which she began binding with a strand of her hair. She intended them as a gift; but here Westover roused, and shook off silence.

"No; I want to speak with you first. Will you hear all I have to say?"

Angela's nosegay fell from her limp hand to the floor, where it was soon unconsciously crushed by his foot.

"Is it about Bobby Prentiss?" she asked, dismay in her eyes.

"No, it is not about Prentiss; it is about another man, as bad as he, though. It is about Senator Dowlie."

Straightway was Angela relieved. Her limpness vanished, comfortable security pervaded her muscles once more. She feared only one man in the world—her husband. For want of a more convenient toy, she played with her arms, stroking them admiringly, as she had before stroked her poodle.

"I am come here this afternoon to ask you to have nothing to do with Senator Dowlie."

"Nothing to do with him?"

"Nothing—to—do—with—him," was the reply, in staccato.

"Never?"

"Never."

Angela crushed the invisible down on her bare arm with a pink nail. In this downward gaze, her lashes cast shadows on her round cheek. Westover would not disturb her reverie. After

a moment of silence, she looked up, dimpling.

"Air you jealous? *He* said plenty of fellows would be, to see him keeping company with me."

"Jealous!" Westover turned the word over with his lips, as if to taste its flavour. It was a foreign word to him. "Well, call it jealous, if you like. I *am* jealous for your honour. Woman's honour is a delicate thing. It is like down; a rude breath will blow it away."

Angela laughed. She did not hear what he said about honour. She was absorbed with the thought of his being jealous.

"Senator Dowlie is a rich man," explained the monitor. "Rich enough to buy and sell twenty such men as Harrison or me. But he is a bad man; he blights whatever he looks on. You must shun

his belongings; you must shun *him*, as you value your own soul."

"Soul!" repeated the girl, wonderingly. Her eyes lifted, full of questioning. The words troubled her. She moved uneasily, and her bosom heaved. Westover had spoken so earnestly that she was stirred. She hardly knew why. A deep breathing made itself heard; it was the poodle. Her eyes fell upon the sleeping heap of white over-fed flesh, and she faltered, as if apprehending separation. "But Pet—you don't mean give up Pet?"

A dark flush rose to Westover's cheek. He brought his hand impatiently down upon the table beside him with a thud that made the dish ring and the oranges jump in their skins.

"Is the beast, child, to be compared with you and your woman's honour? Give the

man his dog, his gifts; they are from the devil. Don't you know they are?"

These words were fierce, but mastered her, as fierce words often master women when men speak them. She felt compelled by his force, though not aware of it. She forgot her dog, her gifts, herself, in a power greater than hers. She invariably did the thing easiest to be done; it was easiest now to obey. Westover rose to his feet; she rose too, and stood before him, quivering. Through the tatters of her meagre nature shone her beauty, whose sweetness touched him.

"Can't you understand that I want to save you from the hands of the spoiler?" he said, folding his arms and looking down upon her with gentleness. "I would do for you what I would wish another man to do for my sister, if she were in your place."

He stopped abruptly. Thought flashed that sister before him. How impossible that she should ever be in Angela's place! The fine throbs of the Westover blood were obedient to hearts of a different pulse from the one before him, in its lovely draperies of flesh.

"Senator Dowlie is such a generous man," faltered Angela. "*They*, every one said so."

"They? Every one?"

"Yes, every one in the troupe; they said he would 'draw.'" She looked apologetic.

"Well, he *may* draw, but so do blood-suckers."

There was something incisive in his sarcasm, but Angela hardly perceived it.

"I didn't think he was nice like you or —or Mr. Hairison," she volunteered, still deprecating.

"A compliment to us," was Westover's comment, with a dry smile. He was not a man to coax, and this was what the girl wanted. She loved the crumbs and tid-bits of affection, for she could not digest in that little heart of hers larger pieces.

"If Senator Dowlie is generous and nice," began Westover, slowly, "then neither Harrison nor I are of your kind, Angela. We cannot remain your friends if he is to be one of them; you will have to choose between us."

Angela looked around the room in a puzzled way; the directness of these words mystified her. Then she fixed her gaze, staring, upon the dark, determined face before her.

"What did you say?" she asked vaguely.

"That you must choose between us and Senator Dowlie."

Her bewilderment was piteous. When the meaning struck clear upon her mind that she might lose the two Virginians as friends, she fell upon her knees in front of Westover, crying out brokenly—

"Oh, Mr. Wustover, don't let go of me! You're all I have to look to. Don't —don't let go of me!"

"How am I to judge you? You are contradictory," he half-whispered.

"Don't judge me; only don't let go of me," pleaded Angela.

She was shaken by a vague sort of terror. Westover leaned forward, with soothing in his voice.

"Don't tremble so, child; besides, you must not kneel to me. Get up, Angela; get up. Be a woman. Heaven intended you for a lovely one. Sit here."

He helped her to rise, pushed her gently into a chair, and sat down beside

her. Had Westover been at home, in the coolness of solitude, he would have cautioned himself against overdoing the part of monitor; he would have reflected, "She is incapable of freedom. She is a creature of servitude, the servitude of the senses. Help her to gain that freedom which the intellect alone gives." But he was not at home nor alone, but near to an untutored girl, whose helplessness touched him, whom he longed to lift.

"I will go," he thought; but he lingered, his features transfigured with a light which was impassioned, yet not enamoured.

"Will you give up Senator Dowlie?" he asked.

She nodded. "I'll give him 'Hail, Columbia!' if you like."

What did she care for Senator Dowlie? He had a wart on the left side of his nose, which offended her girlish sense of ex-

ternals. She murmured something to this effect in the midst of a laugh.

"Will you send back his presents?"

She looked at the various objects that he had given her—the poodle first, the violets clinging dankly to the sides of the goblet, the fruit-basket, the poodle again.

"Can't I jest keep Pets? He's such cump'ny. I never get lonesome with him round."

"Keep the present, retain the donor," spoke a stern voice.

"Well, I'll send him back too," she sighed, with head drooped.

"Remember, I do not mean to buy you," continued the stern voice, with some harshness. "I shall not send you other presents in the place of those you give up."

A little thrill of sensitiveness broke into

Angela's ordinary obtuseness, a blush crept into the dimples of her cheek, and she drew herself up with a poor little attempt at pride.

"I'm not looking for you to pay me, Mr. Wustover," she objected, her head still drooped.

"What are you looking for, Angela?" demanded Westover, in a sudden burst of curiosity.

Unlucky question! The answer to this question had to be worked upon for awhile, for information given by Angela was usually the result of accident. Sometimes, it is true, she happened upon an idea, speaking of right things, but calling them by wrong names. Just now, however, she seemed aware of the seriousness of the occasion, so she fell to picking and choosing her words.

"I'm looking for you to counsel with

me" — the scriptural word gave quaint significance to her words. "I know as well as you, Mr. Wustover, that I'm not fit to take care of myself. Some people can't; I'm one of them."

Westover shook his head. "Every soul must stand alone, Angela, with God only to lean upon."

The question, how far must one man be another man's guide? occurred to him. Was he usurping God's place in this ignorant girl's mind? Was he occupied with her soul's true welfare? Was he thinking too much of her exterior beauty? In the midst of rigorous self-questioning, her speech broke—

"Oh, Mr. Wustover, I'm afraid of God all by myself! He's nearer to you than to me; I know that. We used to pick out our fav'rite saints at Lorette, to send our prayers to God by. Some of them

took the Virgin, but not me. I was afraid of her; she looked so cold and white and strict-like, for all she had the baby in her arms. No; give me the saint that's living and warm, and can talk to me, and——"

She leaned her head forward unconsciously, so that, for support, it touched Westover's shoulder, and a single gold curl grazed his black coat-sleeve. Had it been a dagger, it could not have inflicted a sharper wound. 'Tis not the only time that the weak nature has turned to the stronger human nature for help; this is the essence of catholicism. But men are not intended to act as gods to other men. Such dependence yields a crumbling support. Westover turned pale with a conflict of feelings; but he was a self-restrained man. He had formed the habit of separating, in his mind, the promptings

of the flesh from the intention of the will. He was so conscious of this duality of nature, that he recognized just how much he was obeying the one or encouraging the other. Westover, like the recluse, gained far more power over himself than he did over others. He gained in self-controlling force, but lost in personal magnetism. He drew back now from the burning touch of that gold curl, and said—

"I cannot save your soul, Angela Cloud; that must be your own work."

Disappointment threw a veil over the fresh colours of her face. She shook her head. "Ah! I want to; but it is so hard, I can't alone."

The glimpse of half-seriousness made Westover relent. "You shall not be altogether alone," he said kindly; "I will help you as much as a man can."

"Oh, Mr. Wustover, will you?"

She must have some one to lean on. She must have physical support for every one of life's enterprises.

"Yes; but I must do it my way. Will you agree to whatever I propose?"

"That I will—sure pop." Confident of her friend now, the disciple changed from the serious to the gay mood.

He turned away at this moment; her dimples provoked him. How can you moralize with a kitten? He walked to the fireplace and stood silent. Soon his attention was arrested by a touch on his shoulder, and a voice in his ear. He looked around. Angela had climbed up on a stool, and was blowing these words toward him in the most penitential voice and with the most sorrowing countenance. It was a tantalizing reminder of some of those exaltedly inane saints that we see in that angeldom of the Dresden gallery.

"Don't be mad with poor little me. See, I'll do anything in the whole wide world to please you."

"I cannot talk with you, for you are not serious."

"Ah! I'm going to be serious; I am serious. Look at me now." She smoothed her dress, sat down, and folded her hands in her lap. "Come, begin all over again," she urged. "You asked, Will I agree to whatever you propose? I say, Yes, I will. Now go on."

Westover laughed in spite of himself. "You are alone here in a reckless, growing city, with no one to protect you; this is too exposed a situation, Angela, for a woman as young as you, and circumstanced as you are. While you are left thus, you will be a prey for the unprincipled of our sex. It is imperative; you *must* have a companion of your own sex."

"I don't see why you're not worth half a dozen women," was the answer, with a pout.

"But you forget. I have no right to watch over you—nor has any man, except your husband."

She made a grimace, and fell to ravelling her sleeve.

"Come, child, be reconciled to him; he is your lawful champion. It may be that you exaggerate his cruelty. Isn't that possible?"

She sprang up, her cheeks aflame; for she kept somewhere in that unfolded heart a woman's sense of injury.

"Not I. I will die first. I will drownd myself before ever I'll ever set eyes on Bobby Prentiss again—no, not ef he owned every mine in Colorado, and went down on his knees, here, in front of me, I wouldn't."

This was conclusive, of course; so Westover urged no more. But he reverted to the subject of the companion; a lady who should be her safeguard wherever Angela might go.

There required a good deal of talk on Westover's part to make her see his point. Perhaps she never did see it; but he won from her a reluctant "I'll promise to have a cumpanion if you an' Mr. Hairison want me to."

"Not because we wish it; you should wish it yourself," was Westover's rebuke; then, with a faint thrill of hope to brighten his smile, he added, "Well, you have promised; I believe—yes, I am going to be sure that I may trust you. Do you realize how sacred a promise is?"

His solemnity was copied by a quaint reflection of it upon her face.

"I told you I'd mind."

Westover wondered at himself for still lingering when his point was gained. "To see what she will do next," was his inward explanation. "Why does she not lift her eyelids?" he asked himself, and still lingered. When at last those fringed curtains swung upward, he drank fire from the twin cups of turquoise-blue; fire of expectation cruelly broken when she said the next moment—

"Is there any har-h-m in a girl's getting presents from the fellows; or is it just Dowlie?"

Such words from such lips! maddening! Her language broke the spell which her beauty wove. Westover was baffled. He rose to his feet; a cold look of disappointment swept the glow from his features.

"How can I answer for you?" he said drearily.

"Don't you know?" pursued the questioner eagerly.

"I know this," he vouchsafed; "if you receive presents, you are lost. Will you trust me enough to believe this?"

"Yes," dropped slowly from her lips. "And you told me you'd take care of me, and protect me, and never let go of me."

Angela was exacting the promise now, and Westover felt as if he were tying himself with a rope, while those two eyes of heaven's own colour were watching him, and those two lips murmuring—

"You will, won't you? You are not the man to go back on your word?"

"Yes; I will," answered Westover. At the door he paused, turned, and repeated deliberately, "I will do all that I can, but you must help me." Then he was gone.

That same evening Harrison paid his respects to the *prima donna.* He neither

found nor left her in the serious mood. He quite forgot that he had come to lecture until she said—

"Mr. Hairison, what do you think of me having a cumpanion? Mr. Westover says I must."

Harrison laughed. A companion! He could imagine no greater torture; but he thought it might be different for women, and he resolved to be prudent.

"Why, don't you see"—with a flattering look—"you are such a nice little creature, and so pretty, and that sort of thing, that all the fellows would be falling in love with you; and—and I'll be deuced but I don't see how they can help it." He was speaking to a woman whose countenance was woven of smiles.

"Go on," she said; "I like to hear you talk. Sometimes Mr. Wustover scares me all but." She adjusted herself to the

young man's soft chatter with a girl's adaptability.

Harrison excused himself with the whispered formula, "I am bound to comfort the poor little girl; I would be a brute if I did not. I am not her guardian, nor her keeper—it is not for me to lecture her; on the contrary, I ought to encourage. The best of us need encouragement."

He sighed in sympathy with the race in general, and with Angela in particular; but he added, after half an hour or so, with a twinkle of mischief—

"We men talk a heap of nonsense, Mrs. Cloud; you must not believe all we say."

He saw her take compliments so readily, he wondered how she would pick up the crumbs of disparagement. She shook her head.

"Oh, but I believe you, Mr. Hairison—you and Mr. Wustover, like a book."

"All books are not to be believed, you know."

"Ah! but the Bible is."

Angela's trust, and her mention of the sacred volume, turned Harrison remorseful for the next five minutes. He looked down ashamed. Was he unworthy of trust? Surely not. It is only a prig who objects to a very little innocent flirtation, he had always insisted. His favourite saying, "Honi soit qui mal y pense," the motto upon his letter-paper, went singing through his brain, and he lifted his eyes with habitual unconcern in them.

"Mr. Wustover is the Bible; you——"

"What book shall I be?"

Angela was not ready with an answer, her literature being limited; she had no wish to carry the comparison further.

"Come," changing the subject, "help me learn my part, Mr. Hairison; I 'most know it. I am Clay-ra, a young girl, sweet on a sailor-boy; you be the sailor-boy. I can do better with a real live person to say my part to."

Harrison smiled at the thought of being converted into a dummy man. "What shall I have to do?" he inquired lazily.

"Nothing," came the reassuring answer, "but make out you are asleep."

He laughed at the easiness of his *rôle.* She went on explaining.

"I am dusting the room, when sudden I catch a sight of you I thought dead—drownded, you know, in the Bis-cuit Bay."

Harrison was much amused at geography hurled into the lap of cookery. Murmuring the words, "Biscay, Biscay," he was ordered to shut his eyes tight, which he

did. A little burst of melodious notes beat his assumed sleep down almost into the realms of assured drowsyhood, when he became aware of a dead silence.

"Well," still keeping his eyes carefully closed—"well, why don't you go on?"

"Let me see, where's the place? 'Hug me—hug me.' I was sure that come next."

Harrison opened his eyes in downright amazement, and found the supposed Clay-ra deciphering with difficulty the print of the yellow pamphlet, aided by a groping forefinger, and a labyrinth of perplexity-lines criss-crossing her usually unvexed countenance. The fine show of scarlet on his own cheeks was quite wasted on her, as with bent brow her eyes clung to the text. There was a threat of a kiss in his eyes as he hesitated for a moment, engrossed in watching her; then he made

good the threat, seizing the plump hand that hung loose at her side, and kissing it violently once, twice, thrice.

"There!" he cried. "Will that do, or shall I kiss your mouth too?"

But at the contact of his lips upon her wrist she started back, opened her eyes wide with surprise, knowledge coming to her dull brain chiefly by means of touch. She drew farther back a hair's distance, slowly and very slowly blushed, a beautiful maidenly suffusion.

"Well," inquired Harrison, a little hotly over his folded arms, "did you not say 'Hug me'? I dared not go so far as that."

"'Hug me' is my cue, Mr. Hairison"—reproachfully. "I was looking for my speech. I don't know it all yet; that's why I wanted to rehearse, you see."

These sentences came disjointly, and

accompanied by an expression of vague uneasiness. He left with the blush of mortification on his cheek; it must have burned down into his soul, for the good easy fellow began suddenly to make acquaintance with his conscience.

"I am old enough to know how to behave better," was his thought, walking down the steps. "Westover is right in scolding me. The first flutter of conscience—that holy dove brooding in the breast of man—irritates, and the man who makes a fool of himself is very apt to accuse somebody else of being the fool."

Harrison said next morning in Westover's office, under the influence of a somewhat peevish mood, touching upon the suspicious—

"You are going to saddle the Cloud-Angel"—laughing—"with a companion.

Who? Another angel? Why? For a sudden flight to heaven?"—laughing sarcastically.

"Did you ever hear the adage, 'A bridle for the horse, a whip for the ass, a rod for the fool's back'?"

Westover disregarded his friend's talk about angels, considering Harrison too much given up to *bric-à-brac* tastes.

"Can folly be bridled?"

"You cannot guide a fool, but you can restrain one."

"Is Angela Cloud a fool?"

Westover shrugged his shoulders, but did not reply.

"If you think she is, why don't you let her alone?" demanded Harrison.

"Have you forgotten how differently you once advised?"

"Well, answer me one question anyway, Meade Westover. If she were a free

woman would you marry her? Is that what you are up to?"

Again Westover did not reply; he frowned, and beat a tattoo on the desk with one end of his pocket-knife.

"Come, Meade, you owe me that much confidence, and I'll be dogged if you haven't got some kink in your head, such as——"

"Such as what?"

Westover faced his friend with a look which made Harrison withdraw into an apologetic mildness. He thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets, with the deprecating smile, as he continued—

"Well, such as improving her, making a lady of her, and then marrying her when she is divorced from that blackguard Bob Prentiss."

It was out. There was a mingling of affection, suspicion, and jocoseness in the

glance which Harrison cast from under his eyebrows upon his friend.

"Improve Angela Cloud—make a lady of her! I wish I could. Marry her! Heaven keep me from making such a doubly dyed fool of myself as to do that; and understand once for all, Harrison, that it is not in me to have designs upon another man's wife."

"I know you haven't, old fellow." Harrison grasped his friend's hand impetuously. "No one knows better than I that you are the very top of the soul of honour; but I tell you that there is more danger for you in this concern than there is for me, though you are always anxious about me. I confess I've got a soft spot for the little thing, but it's only skin-deep, while you always go beneath the surface. You get interested without knowing; the most dangerous thing in this world is to

try to improve any one—your affections are sure to get enlisted; and Angela Cloud, with all her innocence, is an artful little animal. She's got sense enough to see on what side her bread is buttered. Come, let me advise you once more. Have nothing more to do with her. I'll draw back too, if you will."

This was good counsel, and Westover recognized it as such; but in his ear rang the words, "Don't leave go of me; take care of me, protect me;" and then these words sounded through ear and brain, as if blown into them by a double bassoon, "I will, I will take care of you, and you must help me." Westover could no more forget his promise than he could forget his name.

"It is too late for that," he said, under his breath, "for I have given my word that, on the honour of a gentleman, I will

save her from pitfalls, if I can. Good heavens, Harrison, she is as—as appealing and beautiful as—as——"

"A Magdalen?" suggested the latter.

"No; she must never have a chance for sin," interrupted Westover, hastily, "for she would never repent."

After Harrison had gone, Westover sat for a long time plunged in thought. Of the nature of these thoughts he gave no outward sign. He tapped the wooden frame of his desk with the shut end of his pen-knife, and sat thus until the mail was placed before him. A business man's correspondence is not interesting usually to any one save himself, but there was one letter among those placed before him which bore the Virginia postmark, and which, in spite of its brevity, he read and re-read, frowning the while and biting the ends of his short dark moustache. This

letter was from his sister, and it was full of reproach.

"Write a few lines" (it ran) "to set my mind at rest. A dozen words in your own handwriting shall silence the rumour vaguely heard in Folksmouth, but which has made me miserable lest it should have even a grain of truth in it. I have not spoken of it at home, but write to me in your old frank way, and say that you *will* not marry this actress whose name is linked with yours."

There was more to the same purpose, and Westover, as he read, curled his firm lip into a bitter smile.

"What a pity that one's womankind will not believe in one!" he muttered. "To be doubted rouses antagonism. Here is my own sister coolly accusing me of marriage with this actress; nay, worse —she actually hints at my being entangled

with some disreputable creature, and fears for my moral welfare. And there sat Harrison doing the same thing something less than half an hour back. What is the matter with them all? What is the matter with me? I have simply not thought about *myself* at all; I have merely wished to benefit a human soul. Bah! sister Gay, your letter has not a wholesome flavour. I will none of it."

Into bits as small as mincemeat went the sister's poor little missive, that had been born of a heavy heart, and that had travelled two thousand miles for nothing.

CHAPTER II.

ONE morning Harrison turned into Westover's office, and found his friend absorbed with the contents of various pigeon-holes; the latter stopped his work in order to give Harrison a hand-shake.

"Sit down. I was wishing to see you, for I leave Denver to-night by the southern express." He went on arranging and re-arranging piles of documents, which he tied with red tape and stowed away in the cells of his desk, without observing his companion's interrogative glance. "The Esperanza is having a

boom; I am going to take fifty more shares. Don't you want to join me?"

Harrison shook his head.

"No; I'll wait awhile. But you said that you wished to see me; can I be of use while you are away?"

Westover ceased from the occupation of sorting papers, and played a tune on the arm of his chair with a bunch of desk-keys.

"Yes, Harrison, you can be of use while I am away." He lifted his eyes full upon his friend; his voice had the serious vibration as he repeated his words, "Yes, you *can* be of use, if you *will*."

"Fire away, then, old fellow. I'd do anything under heaven to serve you except to—to—choose you a wife. I reckon you'd be devilish hard to suit about that; you'd be so choice."

Harrison laughed, but he watched his

friend narrowly under the mask of carelessness. The words of Miss Steptoe recurred to him and perplexed him. He thought her a woman of prophecy.

"I shall trouble you with no such service as that; in fact, the service is not to me, but to Angela Cloud. She is still without a companion of her own sex, and is in the position of the deer pursued, and there are no two ways about it, Harrison, she will go to the dogs if left to herself." His hands dived into the depths of his pockets, and he braced his muscle as if for making a stand.

Though Harrison's interest in Angela Cloud had waned in proportion as it had grown for Miss Steptoe, and though the little actress had, in these latter days, become the subject of debate betwixt his friend and himself, still these words from Westover nettled him.

"You once thought a man a dangerous protection for the little witch, but it seems that you have changed your mind, and that you are now seriously advising me to do the very thing you formerly spent hours of discussion in preventing me from doing. Upon my word, Westover, I did not know that you could be so inconsistent."

Westover shrugged his shoulders. This movement was a rare one with him, and usually pointed the ironical speech. He replied with a flash—

"Consistency is not my bogie, Harrison."

"Could my interest be more damaging than yours?" demanded Harrison, the ready blood flying into his cheek.

"No. You look upon her as a child; I, as a woman: you, as a toy; I, as an embodied conscience: you, as a whim of

nature, a comedy, an experiment, Heaven knows what; I, as an immortal soul, born to lose or to find itself—which?"

Westover brought his shut hand down upon the desk with force, as he concluded this—to him—unusual volley of eloquence.

"Which indeed?" echoed Harrison. "The only difference between us I can see is that you have the hope of changing her; I have not."

"She is an enigma, I will admit; and you misunderstand the kind of protection I mean. She does not require any one to fight battles for her, as you would do, Harrison; for you are a brave fellow. That would be compromising. She simply needs the guiding force, the power that shall stand between her and the consequences of her moral weakness."

"And, knowing so well this fatal lack in her nature, why, Westover, why do

you still feel interested in what becomes of her ?"

The answer to this question was by implication. "There is not only a difference in our way of looking at the girl, but there is a deeper difference, a difference between you and me, Harrison, which cannot be gainsaid. I own I cannot shake off the sense of responsibility. Should she come to harm, I should feel as if it were through lack of effort on my part. There has been a necessity laid upon me. This is a missionary work from which I dare not shrink back."

The speaker's countenance was pale from inward agitation; it was the white radiance of the fanatic.

"Oh, Westover!" groaned Harrison, agitated too, as he recalled Miss Steptoe's warning; "do you think you are right to constitute yourself a providence to Angela

Cloud? There are people whose only title to virtue is being hedged in on every side from vice. Is she one of these?"

"I do not know," was the curt response. Then, after a few minutes' silence, he broke out impatiently, "Then you decline to perform this service, Harrison?"

"By no means; only you must mention what you include in the service. You are such a transcendentalist that you will have to define your bond."

"Bond! The word is harsh; I do not like it," objected Westover. "It certainly contains no clause that would be disapproved by your — your friend Miss Steptoe." Westover caught sight of a second blush winging across the freckles of that susceptible fellow's cheek. "I do not ask you to visit her, nor to waste presents upon her, Harrison, for that would do neither of you any good; but

I ask that, while I am away, you will be on the watch for such rascals as Dowlie" —Westover ground his teeth—"for such reckless bravados as Riley; that you will make them understand the defenceless girl has friends, true friends—not lovers—who will shield her from the destroyer."

Unconsciously Westover held out his hand, and Harrison grasped it. He forgot admonition, censure, Miss Steptoe, in generous admiration of the friend who stood before him idealized, and revealing under his man's exterior a virginal whiteness of spirit which, if characteristic of the fanatic, was so likewise of the hero. Here was the flowering out of that feudal system which maintained in the Southern States before the war, and in Virginia preeminently—the reverence of woman and that particular virtue which she symbolizes.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, in his surprise, "it is a hard task you have assumed, and a thankless one; but I promise this—I will stand by Angela Cloud during your absence with all the power that in me lies. But that is not much, you know, Westover."

Harrison, soft-hearted fellow, experienced, even as he spoke, a sensation of pleasure in the thought of beholding Angela's eyes of heavenliest blue. There was a duty imposed, but there was also a compensation; for beauty is its own reward, and "if eyes were made for seeing, then beauty is its own excuse for being."

The next morning Westover waked to find himself far on his southward journey. He mused long and deeply, with knitted brow, as the train sped forward; but it was musing to no purpose, for the brows

did not unknit, and the grey eyes continued to preserve their sphinx-like expression. Towards the evening of the second day, his train went steaming into the depôt of a small mining town, cradled amid the lofty plateau of the Sangre de Cristo Range. The rude little town of Santa Anna was a resort in those days for miners and shareholders passing to and fro over the border, and Westover was not sanguine in his expectation of finding very choice entertainment there. The townspeople were Mexicans, and he avoided their slovenly public-house, finding refuge at last under the hospitable roof of an American—a widow woman, sensible, orderly, and widely known among the miners, to whom she was generous with her advice. So popular was she that she went by the name of Little Mother, and so stringent was the border chivalry

of the miners of Santa Anna that it allowed none to give her a rough word.

"Go to Little Mother's," suggested the waggoners crowding the depôt; "she'll give you a good squar' meal of victuals."

It was the hour which poets are pleased to call the shut of day when Westover knocked at Little Mother's shanty for admission.

"I guess I've got a spare bed," she said, answering the knock, and taking a fancy "right off" to her guest's fine open countenance. "But I'm *that* hurried, for it's nigh on to supper-time, that I'll jes' tell yer the way to the spare bedroom, and let yer find it out fur yerself. Go up these yere stairs. It's the room as has two beds into it. It's upstairs-like, but it opens out on the corral all the same. The house, yer see, is built on an embankmunt. That's right"—with a nod

and a smile, following Westover with her eyes as he climbed the steep stairs, bending his head when he reached the top, in order to avoid collision with the rafters.

The room was easily found, and was primitive in the extreme. Westover's system of theology was broad, he was circumscribed by no creeds; but, as we have seen, his philanthropic pulse thrilled to the touch of humanity. He was a strange mingling of the practical and the visionary. He smiled, as he entered the rude room, to behold a wide-browed, mild-faced cow thrusting her horns in at the opposite door, which opened upon the stable-yard. There was something scriptural in the scene. He thought of Christ in His manger, and his heart stirred softly.

It was one of those gentle March evenings yielding sweet foretaste of sum-

mer. There were three windows, all open. By one of these Westover sat down, removed his hat from his head, and enjoyed the grey, star-spangled twilight which crept into the chamber, softening down the rough bare floor, the coarsely habited cot-beds, the water-bucket, with its tin dipper, and the straight-backed wooden chairs. But there were evidences of feminine taste—crocheted tidies; a Holland table-cloth on the pine bureau; a cheap, highly-coloured vase, containing the dried grasses of the preceding summer. On the wall hung a chromo; while on the bureau a Bible lay, sentineled by two mumpy-looking china dogs with a deal of red and blue paint upon them; and Westover was not slow to perceive that a neatness nothing short of exquisite pervaded each object.

The yard which adjoined this room was

full of stir—a train of mules being unhitched from the lumber-waggons, the operation seasoned by the swearing of the waggoners and the yelping of curs; in a corner of the corral a cat, nestled on a straw-heap, was administering motherly nourishment to a litter of kittens; neighbour to these was a goat, calmly surveying the frisking of her two kids. The air began to blow more keenly from the uplands, along whose brow was curled the ribbon of snow, narrow, white, like fillets upon the broad brows of a goddess. Out of the gathering gloom which filled the interior came a voice and these words—

"Supper's up, and you'd best come down quick, sir, else you mayn't find a place."

Westover did not fail in obedience to this order, and when he descended the

break-neck staircase, he found himself at the entrance of an eating-room made out of a shed. The long deal table completely filled this rough-and-ready apartment, and was already crowded with men of every variety — miners, engineers, waggoners, workmen, and some of them were desperate-looking characters. "Little Mother" was bustling in and out, bringing heavily laden dishes from the adjoining kitchen, whence arose a steam of savoury smell, seasoned with the penetrating scent of onion.

At first Westover ate, as did the others, ravenously, silently; but, his appetite becoming appeased, he looked around him at the countenances of his fellow-travellers. Some were surly-looking, some well-favoured, but all were rough. Facing him sat a man a year or two younger than himself, wearing a hunting-shirt opened

low on the throat, and a wide-brimmed Spanish hat, not removed for the meal. He looked up once from his place, and honoured Westover with a scowling glance from his dark fiery eyes, glowering under eyebrows of midnight blackness, as if on the alert for some revenge. Westover thrilled at this glance, with the sensation that this was not the first time of beholding the man. But where had they met before, and when? He studied the face, with its straight, delicate features, its picturesque repose—for it *was* reposeful to melancholy when not lit up by the restless eyes—in order to gain an answering glance of recognition. In vain; the man did not look up again, but continued to eat hastily and in silence, scowling into his plate at times, as if he would willingly run his knife through the unoffending delft.

"If this man is a villain, he is so from choice, not necessity," thought Westover, noting the well-moulded hands and taper fingers, and catching the soft utterance with which he once addressed "Little Mother."

Westover had seen this man before, though each of the previous meetings had been, as now, in partial darkness, and the knowledge that it was Prentiss whom he confronted was flashed upon him just as a platter steaming with pork and beans was set before the guests in rapid succession by Little Mother, who stood back, after accomplishing this feat, with arms akimbo and cheeks streaming with perspiration, to enjoy her guests' satisfaction in the savoury dish, for these were hungry men, she knew.

"Take away this nasty mess," shouted a small man, whom Westover had not

noticed before. "Take away this cursed pork, and hand along something fit for a gentleman to eat."

The roughest people have a system of etiquette, and this was a breach of manners on the part of the small, pale Jew, who did his best to curl the hooked nose of his race in testimony of the horror with which he regarded the abomination set before him. He had been the last to come in, so that the principal part of the viands had disappeared under those keen appetites before he had had a fair chance to appease his; but criticism becomes sharper as appetites become blunter, and more than one countenance was now lifted upon his with rugged disapproval.

"The meat and the potatoes is all done, sir," began Little Mother, soothingly; "and the beans is good and hot."

"Dang the beans!" broke in the Jew,

wrathfully. "Beans are no dish for a gentleman."

"Gentleman!" interrupted the young man with the Spanish hat, who had sat silently in front of Westover. "Excuse me, but wait a second, and I'll teach you the meaning of the word 'gentleman.'"

Out came a brace of pistols, as if by magic; they were placed on either side of the speaker's plate, then he leaned back in his chair, and turned his great eyes, that seethed with all human passions, full upon the Jew-pedlar, who grasped at the table-cloth and quailed beneath them. At him pointed the two muzzles; a touch to the triggers and all would be over.

"Little Mother," cried this new master of deportment, in the quiet, almost well-bred accents that had surprised Westover, "you see that fellow there; I want you to

understand he likes beans, and he means to eat those beans."

There was pitiless irony in this man's voice, as if he had been used to torturing, as if his ancestors had been nourished on the Inquisition, as if the *vendetta* mingled with his blood. When he had spoken he laid his shapely hands upon the pistols, to wait the effect of his words.

Interested silence reigned around the table, while the Jew, with a helpless look at his persecutor, bolted the beans. They shot like so many bullets discharged from a pop-gun down his unwilling throat; after which he looked up with a sigh of relief, wiping his mouth, meanwhile, on his coat-sleeve. But the tormentor was relentless; hardly had the last bean disappeared, when he called aloud, in the incisive voice which shows that it is accustomed to obedience—

"Another plate of beans, Little Mother; that man wants more beans."

There was no gainsaying; every one knew the determination of this lawless fellow, in carrying out laws of his own making; besides which, every man present enjoyed the practical joke, in that grim, taciturn way peculiar to men whose physical natures have been disciplined by hard labour. They could laugh hilariously enough when once started, but it took a good deal to start them; there was inertia to overcome, a reaction to be set up from the ingrained habit of looking at life seriously and stolidly.

The second plate of beans was followed by a third, before the inquisitor was willing to cease from his self-imposed labours upon the Israelite's manners. Little Mother looked deprecating; of no avail; it was the exercise of power that the

young Mexican loved, not the cause of woman—though you might have sworn that he was a knightly-fellow, if you judged by external softness and smoothness. This, however, would in this instance have set you wholly astray. In vain did the unfortunate Hebrew glance up from his plate, with the intention of asserting his manly rights; he was unarmed, while in front of him pointed two muzzles, while a small pale hand toyed with the triggers—a hand that was no virgin in blood-shedding, as any man present would have sworn. The owner of these formidable weapons leaned back in his chair with careless grace, enjoying the scene; the Jew proceeded chokingly into his third plate of beans.

The men exchanged muttered comments, and presently one pushed back his chair from the table, chuckling. This was

a general signal; the flood-gates were opened immediately. All other men, if we except Westover, laughed and pushed back their chairs. Appetite being satisfied, each was now free to amuse the inner man. Guffaws, in a variety of keys, reverberated through the shed-room; chairs were kicked over; and, finally, one by one they filed out; and when Westover looked around, he discovered that even the Jew and the young Mexican had vanished with the rest.

When Westover went to his room that night, he was too tired to feel any curiosity concerning his room-mate, who had been the first to turn in; he perceived that a dark head indented the pillow of the cot-bed nearest the door, and that there was a miscellaneous collection of boots, pistols, and such paraphernalia as form a borderer's equipment.

In a twinkling he was asleep, and so deeply that the re-awakening seemed to be merely a consciousness of sleep. He seemed to be lying at the mouth of a cavern, and to be hearing a voice which called, "Mr. Wustover! oh, Mr. Wustover! you promised you'd take care of me and save me from Bobby Prentiss. He's got his hands about my throat this very minit. Oh—oh-h!"

Westover waked wide, the sensation of a shriek in his ear, though whether he had given it himself, or the other man, or whether there was a third person in the room, holding on to the foot of his bed and sobbing his name, he could not tell. He half rose, rubbed his eyes to dispel the illusions of sleep, and looked around. The chamber was full of shadowy lights, whether moonlight or early dawn he could not make out; but this bewilder-

ment was soon dispelled by a voice from the neighbouring cot, which cried out, with curses uttered in the most tuneful Spanish—

"Look a' here; what do you mean by calling out Angela Cloud, and waking me up at this time o' night?"

"I must have been dreaming," was Westover's confused reply.

"Can't you leave that vixen alone, and let her bide or go to the devil her own way?"

The Mexican sat in his bed bolt upright, and the two men faced. The meagre moonshine, with its play of light and shadow about his companion's head, turned it from ebony to ivory, and from ivory back to ebony. It made Westover feel as if he were the victim of a narcotic, or why must he be for ever pursued by Angela Cloud?

"Well, *diavolo!* what are you staring at me for? I think I must be giving you a lesson in bedroom manners, eh?"

With a Mephistophelean grin, the desperado settled his jet-black curls on the pillow, placed his silver-mounted rifle against his cheek, and kept Westover well within the range of his eye.

Westover stammered apologies, thought he must have had nightmare, and sank upon his pillow once more. Sleep, however, was gone. Silence fell, but it was soon broken by Prentiss's measured breathing; he had fallen to sleep quickly.

Westover lay wide-eyed, until the setting moon and the voices of the waggoners in the yard outside warned him that he must rise and prepare for his journey. He dressed noiselessly. Prentiss did not rouse, even when Westover paused for a moment at his bedside, to glance at the dark face

tossing upon its pillow, before he undid the latch and passed out in the chilly dawn. Had Prentiss recognized this man who had been his adversary upon the skirts of Denver, he would not have allowed this opportunity for revenge to escape him; but his vision was not clear like Westover's—it was fevered by his own dark thoughts. He was the child of freak, absorbed in himself and his own wild projects, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. To him, therefore, Westover appeared as a stranger, like the others around him, and that was all. So he slept on after his room-mate left him, conjuring up Angela's form in dreams; and that he had some plot on hand, you might have told by the fire which leaped in his eyes while he sat at breakfast, and which drove him away from Little Mother's at an early hour.

The Esperanza mine kept Westover in one of the most isolated of mountain valleys for more than a week; but business was brisk, and the mine was "panning out gloriously." At last he declared himself ready to leave the camp, and the lumbering waggons which had carried him thither brought him thence across a rugged backbone of mountain devoid of trees, owing to the clearings by fire, and pitted, as if with small-pox, by mines in every stage of development or decay; for some were bogus mines, while others were worked out. A drearier landscape could not well be found. Growth was blasted, the earth was rifled of her hidden treasures; the very soil seemed under a curse. There was no promise of domestic comfort, no huddling of cosy mountain homes under the breastwork of the hills, no grazing of solemn cattle, no twittering of birds; all was

desolation. Right glad was Westover to alight at Little Mother's door once more. As no one was about, he entered and sat down in the shed-room, empty now of those bustling forms and preoccupied faces he had seen there a week before. He seemed to see them all again, especially Prentiss with his leaping eyes, sneering smile, and wide sombrero. It seemed as if he sat long there, undisturbed except by the ticking of a huge eight-day clock and the purring of a grey cat, that seemed to have a kinship with the clock, so seriously and placidly it kept time to the ticking with its muffled purr. At last the door opening upon the kitchen was pushed open, and Little Mother peeped in.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Wustover, is it?" she said, coming farther into the room and looking around to see if they

two were alone. "I'm proud and glad to see you back safe and sound; the sight of such as you is good for sore eyes."

"I'm sure I'm glad to be back," returned Westover, rising from the wooden settle, with something of his father's courtly manner. "The Esperanza is as God-forsaken a country as I want to see for a good long while."

"Yes, that's a true word, Mr. Wustover; even this yere place is bad enough. I've lived among the miners going on ten year, and I've got to love some on 'em same as they wuz my own childern; but I can't keep from missing Eastern ways, heving a little flower-garden, ef it's ever so small, keeping the sabbath holy, too, Mr. Wustover. There's no such thing as sabbath here. I always will hev my house and what little bit I've got clean an' quiet of

a Sunday. But 'tain't no use, they will play cards; and—and the wust is, I don't mind seeing them doing it like I used to. It seems as if we were all hanging millstones about our own necks and going the wrong way out of this world. I ain't so much as looked on a preacher's face since I've been out here. When I saw you the first evening you come, I didn't know but you might be one, you seemed so reverend-like. You brought to my mind the minister I was accustomed to in Hadley when I was a little girl. He was a beautiful man, and they tell me he's got to be one of the greatest men in the East now."

Westover felt inclined to smile at this naïve praise thus bestowed upon him, but he perceived how much in earnest the little woman was when she slid into a chair by the window, and, raising a corner

of her apron to her eyes, silently overflowed it with tears.

"Has any trouble come upon you, Little Mother?" inquired Westover, with a voice of sympathy.

"Trouble? Ay; there's always plenty of that article. If it isn't your own, it's somebody else's. There's no call for me to be a-grieving like this, Mr. Wustover. I know he was a bad lot, but women are mighty fool creeturs; they're giving to loving *them* best as is good fur nothing; and then, him and my boy were of an age."

"Who?" demanded Westover, concisely, breaking into Little Mother's lamentations.

"Bobby Prentiss," was the answer—"Bobby Prentiss, sir. Heven't you heard how he was killed the day after you left here to go to Esperanza?"

"Killed?" repeated Westover, mechanically, as if he did not know what the word meant.

Little Mother could not repress an affectionate sob. The clock ticked with the impartial regularity of a judge about to pronounce a criminal's sentence; the cat purred peacefully, as if to intimate delicately yet didactically that Prentiss's death would make but small change in the world's affairs.

Westover was thinking intently. Those jet-black curls, those volcanic eyes—was it possible that they had already ceased to live? Those small shapely hands; he could see them now working nervously at the trigger of the silver-bossed rifle. It oftentimes startles one more to hear of the death of one whose life has only touched ours upon the outside, than it does to hear of the death of a friend, whose spirit has

mingled with ours, and whose ceasing to be has been already to us the subject of anxious thought; one startles, the other grieves. The dissolution of a stranger, while unaccompanied by personal feeling, sets you to visualizing death as an actual power. Its absolute quality strikes you with all the more of wonder because grief is not present to emphasize the emotional and to dull the intellectual part of your nature. So it was with Westover.

"Dead!" he reiterated. "Why, that man looked as hearty as your or I—heartier, for that matter. How was it possible that any one who was so intensely alive should now be a senseless corpse?"

"He brought it on himself," sighed Little Mother. "He was that headstrong no earthly power could stay his will when it was roused. He owned the biggest part of the Chiquita mine, but it's been in

litigation, Mr. Wustover, and, of course, wuk was stopped. What does Bobby Prentiss do but order the wuk to go on. He used his father's name—his father is president of the comp'ny—he bullied the superintendent, but *he* wouldn't give in, for it was agin the law; but Prentiss was always for takin' the law in his own hands. I used to say to him, says I, 'When you let go of the law, Mr. Prentiss, you're like the man who went up to a mile-post to find out where his road lay. Then he up and took the road contrairy to what the sign told, because, says he, all roads lead to Rome, and if I take the longest way round, why, I'll see more of the country.'"

"Well, what next?" asked Westover, anxiously, curtailing Little Mother's moralizing. "What did he do next?"

"Why, the superintendent he set his teeth like grim death, but Prentiss he got

together some of the miners as had the wust name in the whole country round, and promised 'em double pay. The chink of money is the music the most of people likes best; so they all agreed, and in they went into that old shaft on the high-road to Sonora, not a half-mile from the trout stream. That shaft had been set down as unsafe six months ago, but what's to be is going to be; I believe that, Mr. Wustover, come what may. They went in, and they never come out no more."

"The mine caved in?"

"Yes; the blasting shook the old weak props, and—and it fell in, the mine fell in. Yonder is Bobby Prentiss's grave, and the twelve miners with him."

Little Mother opened the window, through which they could see the setting sun pouring its red blood upon the distant foot-hills.

"Yonder cone-shaped hill that's reddest, that's where he lies," she said. "The Lord forgive me for saying anything aginst the dead as cannot stand up for theirselves, but there's folks, some living, as ull thrive better for his lying low, poor boy. I've heerd that he has a sweet little wife, innicent and pritty as a primrose, and that he's 'most killed her. They tell that he held pistols to her two ears oncet, and threatened that he'd blow her brains out ef she ever let on that he was rough with her; and a lady from Antonito told me how he made her wear bracelets and necklaces to hide the bruises. But you can't believe all you hear. It's them as talks most that have least sense, and them as hears most as have least work to do in the world. All I know, Mr. Wustover, is that Bobby Prentiss was well-spoken, and the likeliest young fellow, too, that ever

I set eyes on, for him and my son were that thick oncet you couldn't have shot at one without hitting the other with the same bullet. He's lying cold and dead, poor Prentiss is, and I cannot find it in my heart to blame him overmuch; but I wush I might know that it isn't true about the pritty little wife. My heart melts-like for her. Women have something in 'em that pulls them together, Mr. Wustover; and we cannot forgit our young days neither."

A tear fell from the motherly eye—a tear for Angela Cloud, and one also for her own blighted wifehood, for sympathy springs from the heart that has suffered life-wounds, ever ready to bleed anew.

Westover felt a curious, unaccountable sensation creep through him at the mention of Angela. Somehow she seemed changed, magnified by her relations with this

desperado now that he was dead. What a tragedy! Westover fancied the pistols crushed against her tender rosy ears, the bruises clinched into her wrists, and the melting throat-lines reddened with rough handling. He felt himself burn with anger, for he could not brook cruelty to the weak. How often, on the old plantation at home, had he gone in search of the lambs, when they lay half buried in the spring snows! how carefully had he carried them to the barn-yard, tending the weanlings with his own hands! It had been his mission to minister to the feeble. Passionate sympathy rushed over him anew, and he said soothingly—

"She ran away from Mr. Prentiss, Little Mother. She is happy, I believe, and doing well, too, in Denver. She supports herself by music. She has a—a beautiful voice, you know."

An angel's voice, Westover might have said, but that he was a prudent, self-contained man. Yet why should he be thus self-contained? A *prima donna's* voice is every man's property. How free she was now—free not only to receive the praise of the great public, but also that of any single individual! She was now no longer a wife bound by marriage ties; those heaven-tinted eyes might gaze without sin into some man's loving ones, those delicate palms might cling to his strong arm without reproach.

This idea, in a thousand forms, visited Westover's mind on the homeward journey. She might marry now and leave the stage, too dangerous a field for one possessing the sensuous charm of voice, and without strong dramatic talent or pronounced ethical qualities. She must leave the stage, he murmured over and over; but the question

of her marriage only suggested itself to his mind as fact, not as sentiment. It would be well for her to marry; but whom should she marry? And this question he did not pretend to answer.

CHAPTER III.

ON Lorrimer Street Westover ran across Harrison. The latter looked grave.

"Back already?" he cried. "Esperanza all right?"

A hand-shake.

"Famous. You must go shares with me next time, eh? What's the news?"

"Nothing much," began Harrison, evasively; then hurriedly, as if he thought better to plunge into his worst news offhand, "Nothing, excepting that you haven't come home a day too soon, if you have any influence over Angela Cloud. I've tried, and I give her up."

"What do you mean? Explain."

"Why, Dowlie's been after her; he's had her driving with him, and he's going to lunch with her."

"When?" inquired Westover, briefly.

"To-day, I believe."

"Let's go there."

"What, now, right away?"

"Yes, now, right away."

Harrison took out his watch. "It's about the lunch-hour now. You have often advised me for my good, as I plainly see; now let me advise you once, Westover. Don't go there and get into a scrape with Dowlie; the girl is not worth it."

"Harrison, I don't scorn your advice—it is sound; but I *must* go, and I will go alone, if need be."

"Why must you go?"

"I gave her my word that I would

stand by her in her extremity, and my word, upon the honour of my manhood, I will keep."

"High-flown honour," was Harrison's moody comment. "If you will go, I will go with you, then."

They turned into a side street, and Harrison continued—

"The girl's head is turned upside down. If she had had the companion we spoke of just before you left for the Esperanza, Fanny Steptoe would have gone to see her, but under the circumstances she couldn't. I remonstrated with Angela, and almost made love to her myself. She cried, and said she didn't like Dowlie in one breath, and then, in the next, she said how could she help being pretty, and people's liking her, and being kind to her? It's my opinion the theatre people put her up to it. I tell you, Westover, there's

more tenacity in these soft-skinned, blossom-faced creatures than you, with your ideals, dream of—tenacity for evil, I mean, for they don't seem to be troubled overmuch with tenacity for good."

"It is hard for a woman to fight the battle of life, single-handed," returned Westover. "It is nature's law that she should work in company with man; for this reason ordinary women marry. It is only the strong ones that can afford to be alone; so the weak are made the most attractive, or the most appealing to our sex—their only hope is in marriage."

Harrison stole a look at his friend. What did he mean? But there was no time for conjecture, for they stood in front of Mrs. Shurtleff's boarding-house.

They found Angela in her private parlour. She was fast learning the ways

of *prima donnas*—that childish eagerness to magnify self, and hedge about with every appliance of luxury the sublime case which holds the human voice, is a deification of body. Angela had heard her own praise too often to be surprised by it any longer. There was a confidence in her manner which had almost the effect of dignity, a saucy pout in her under lip, a debonaire expression, like that of a child who has been too much caressed. It was not the sort of beauty that raises a man's mind, but of the sort that deludes him. As she saw Westover enter, she ran forward, blushing a little, but murmuring—

"Oh, Mr. Wustover, air you going to scold me too? I couldn't help it, 'deed I couldn't. I don't like Dowlie. He smells horrid of tobacco and horses."

The pink-veined nostrils, educated to expensive extracts, took a curve in the air.

Before Westover could answer, a knock was heard at the door. The party of three inside were silent. Angela immediately turned pale, and fixed her eyes on Westover with a frightened quaver in their fringed depths. Another knock.

"Come in," cried she, faintly; and in walked Senator Dowlie.

He was a portly, elderly man, and, as all the world knew, possessed a wife, a family, and several millions of money. He was smart, and as successful as only the man can be who has set himself to the task, for over forty years, of making money, whether honestly or dishonestly; he was successful, as only a man can be who stops at nothing which is to procure him what he wishes. Running along in this hard-grained nature was a minute current of æsthetic feeling, which in his earlier life had shown itself by

excessive admiration of fine horses, but which in later life had moved a plane higher, and evinced itself by excessive admiration of fine women.

This gentleman entered the room with an easy swing, frowned when he noticed that other gentlemen were present, and seated himself stiffly beside the table, whereon were spread the beginnings of a light lunch. It was a choice affair, Westover perceived, in the hasty glance he cast upon the veal-salad, with its decorations of sliced lemon and its bottles of Veuve Cliquot; it was neat, tasteful, relishable. Senator Dowlie sat down in an armchair close to the Veuve Cliquot, drew a newspaper noisily from his pocket, and screened his ill-concealed vexation with its folds.

Neither Westover nor Harrison, now that they were in for it, were willing

to give up the field. They sat down in armchairs on either side of Angela, who remained piteously silent, though she cast sheep's eyes at the veal salad, and wondered who ought to speak first. Harrison and Westover likewise preserved an elaborate silence, which became at last oppressive; and Senator Dowlie laid down his paper on the table with the emphasis of a man of business, and exclaimed, as he eyed vindictively the helpless lump of pink-and-white flesh before him—

"It seems, madam, that this gets tiresome!" then he turned towards Westover, shrugging with offensive meaning.

"If you find it tedious, sir, you've a sure way of ending it; the door lies open before you."

Westover pointed this speech by flinging open the door, and turning towards the

senator with a bow of exaggerated haughtiness.

"Imprudent to the last degree," groaned Harrison, inwardly.

"Upon my word!" shouted Dowlie, leaping upon his feet with a bound that shook the room, "air you aware that this is an outrage? Air you aware of the name of the person you air addressing?" Then, changing from the magnificent third person to the first, "I am Senator Dowlie, I'd have you to know." Then, turning to Angela, who clung trembling to the tablecloth for support, "Why, madam, I do not know who your friends air; but I know this much, that they air fools to compete with me. I could buy the two of them fifty times over."

"Compete with you!" exclaimed Westover, in a voice tremulous from passion. "By Heaven! what do you take us for?

Perhaps you mean that you can afford to buy this woman, soul and all! Is that what you mean? Understand, once for all, Senator Dowlie, that our ambition is not to compete with you in such hellish traffic." How he would have relished knocking down this portly senator, and giving him a taste of his heels!

"Then get out of the way, you confounded dog-in-the-manger!" jerked out the senator between his teeth; "you've no right to interfere with my plans, I tell you." Turning to Angela, with a show of politeness—"No right whatever to interfere with our little lunches, eh, Mrs. Cloud?"

"I have a right—a right given me, pressed upon me, by the lady herself." These words were struck out in a voice that pierced like a clarion, and Westover's whole form dilated. Dowlie, and even

Harrison, fell back, quelled by his look. "You, Angela, gave me this right; on your knees prayed me to stand by you. Do you remember how I gave you my promise? Well, I am here to fulfil it. Now, once and for all, will you have that man for your friend"—pointing to Dowlie—"or will you have me?"

Angela comprehended at last that the occasion was momentous, and that her decision made now was to be final. She glanced with startled eyes from Dowlie to Harrison, then from Harrison to Westover; in fascinated silence she looked upon him. His eyes were like those of one coming from a sacrament, mystically sweet, yet solemn. She seemed upbreathed by one of her transient flashes of real feeling. She swam across the room, holding out her hands to him, and crying out—

"You, Mr. Wustover. I know that no harm can come nigh me if you will be my friend."

A sneering laugh broke from Senator Dowlie's protruding lips. "Upon my word, it's an amazingly interesting scene, this; but I don't understand it. What is this gentleman's relation to you, my dear?" He would have placed a large hairy hand upon her shoulder, but she whisked away from his reach, and placed herself behind Westover, who stood in front of the shivering white creature, a fortress of defence. Dowlie fell back, with a second sneering laugh. "Oh, he's your guard-een, is he?" then, with insulting emphasis, "But is he the only guard-een you air agoing to have, my pretty one?"

Westover answered in her stead. "Yes, if she is willing, and if such action is

necessary to save her from the hounds." His lips curled with a scorn that no man would choose to be the victim of for any longer time than he could help. "Say, Angela"—he turned so as to face her—"shall I be your guardian from this time forth and for ever? Consider well before you answer."

"What, husband?" "Not marriage, Westover?" were exclamations that broke from Senator Dowlie and Harrison in a breath.

Westover paused, as if to gather all his forces together for a huge resolve, before he answered, "Ay, that is what I mean. What else will avail? Who else has the right to protect a woman except her husband? Angela, do you hear me? If I assume any right over you, it must be a lawful right, that none shall gainsay."

"Westover, are you mad?" cried Har-

rison, grasping his friend's shoulder. "Have you forgotten Prentiss?"

"Excuse me, my dear young friend," repeated Senator Dowlie, with sarcastic emphasis. "Don't you progress raither rapidly? I understood that this lady has a husband."

"She *had* a husband," was the reply, given with Doric simplicity. "She has one no longer; Prentiss is dead. He was killed by the caving in of a portion of the Chiquita mine a few days ago. I have just come from there."

A silence that could be felt followed. Senator Dowlie was the first to break it, for he was not the man to contend for rights that did not belong to him.

"This position of affairs quite alters the case, Mrs. Cloud," he murmured, taking his hat. "I am not a marrying man, so won't on any account interfere

with your prospects. Wush you both good luck. Good luck, sir"—with a sneer at Westover—"Good morning, gentlemen;" and he was gone.

The noise made by the closing door aroused Angela from her stupor. She lifted her head and looked around.

"Did you say Bobby Prentiss was dead?" she asked.

"Dead," was the laconic answer.

She was lost in thought for a moment; then she bent her neck forward, so as to look deep into Westover's eyes, and asked—

"Mr. Wustover, you ain't fooling me?"

He shook his head.

"Then I am a widow." She almost smiled, and stepped in front of the walnut-frame looking-glass, as if to note the changes that might have taken place in her in this changed condition of her

life. "Prentiss dead—widow," were the words she murmured, to get acquainted with this new and strange idea. "I can marry again, can't I?" She glanced furtively at Harrison; then drooped her face with a shyness exquisitely rare in her poses, played with an end of her waist-ribbon, and murmured, "Were you fooling me, Mr. Wustover, when you said something about marrying, and being my guard-een for good and all?"

She opened her eyes full on Westover as she ended her question. Then, for the first time in his life, he blushed in her presence. He was about to answer, but Harrison interrupted.

"Oh, Westover, consider before you repeat that rash speech of yours; or, rather, take it back. Angela cannot understand all the traditions of your past life. She will not hold you to an

offer generously made in order to protect her from that man Dowlie; will you, Angela?"

While he spoke, the girl paced the room excitedly, and Westover threw in quickly—

"Harrison, it is of no use; I recognize your friendship, but I have spoken, and what I have said is past recall."

Harrison frowned gloomily, and sat down in the chair which Dowlie had vacated beside the lunch-table. Angela paused in her walk, and listened with strained brow; excitement chilled the bloom upon her cheek, and darkened the slight indentation under either eye with a violet shadow.

Westover, his arms folded, his countenance resolute, repeated after the solemn hush—

"I will take care of you always, Angela,

if you marry me; if you do not, I shall leave you, and then I'm afraid you will fall into the hands of such as Dowlie."

"Leave me?" shrieked Angela, covering her face with her hands.

"Yes, unless the protection is sanctioned by marriage; there must, there shall be, no doubtful connection between us. Mind, I am not trying to persuade you; I only want you to understand the position. Will you, or will you not, marry me?"

Harrison tapped the floor impatiently with his foot.

"I would like to, but—I am afraid. Mr. Hairison is sitting over there looking at me hard. He doesn't want me to; he thinks I'm not fit to be your wife, and—and——"

Harrison laughed outright in excess of nervous irritation.

"But you, Angela, what do you wish?"

Westover bent gravely toward her, reassuringly.

"To be your wife." The answer was given in the clear tone of decision, and in uttering it, she glided to his feet upon her knees.

Westover's confirmation of his vow was a hand-touch upon the loops of her bright hair, and the gravest of smiles, as he said—

"We are to be married, then, Angela, and the marriage must take place at once; if at all, it must be to-morrow. Do you think you can be ready by to-morrow?"

Angela thought she could; but the two men had never seen her look so subdued. Perhaps they were shocked, when she added, at the time of leave-taking—

"It seems queer-like to be a widow; but I'm glad it's Bob Prentiss's widow I am."

Westover, poor fellow, would have desired the pretty *protégée* to show at least a grain of sentiment for the living husband that was to be, even if she could exhibit no spark of feeling for the dead husband that had been; but here was his punishment, to look for ever into a lovely face and beg for love which had no home there.

"Good heavens!" thought Harrison, when they took their leave, "what a precious fool he is going to make of himself! Stranger yet that this girl, who must have had her eye on him all the while, is going to marry the only man of us all who never made love to her."

Harrison accompanied Westover to his boarding-house that night. They sat for a long time over their cigars in silence, and then Harrison said—

"Upon my soul, Westover, I could

almost feel myself inclined to laugh if you were not in such a scrape. Are you in earnest about being married to-morrow? because, if you are, I cannot speak of it as a scrape after that, you know. Come, now, seriously, are you in earnest, or is it merely a ruse to keep Angela in check? she looked enough awed by what you said, to play the part of a pretty little nun for the next six weeks. Say that you are not in earnest, do!"

"In earnest?" repeated Westover, with an accent of reproof. "Can a man be more in earnest. When I asked Angela Cloud to be my wife, I did so upon the honour of a gentleman. Could you doubt that?"

"Doubt you—your intentions, I mean. Oh no; I'd as soon doubt the polar star. But I thought you'd agree to sleep on the problem; and I can't help remembering

how you used to give me such good advice. I'm mighty glad you did, else I might never have had such good luck with Fanny Steptoe. But don't you think that you need some advice pretty badly yourself, old fellow?"

"I do, with all my heart, I do." Westover's words were pointed by a look of pain in his candid eyes. "I am free to admit all you would say; but it's of no use, I shouldn't take it. This thing is fate." He puffed at his cigar resolutely, and with an air of gloom.

"You always were a fatalist, Westover, and you always will look on the most serious aspects of life. I must get Fanny Steptoe to see you. She's one of the best talkers I ever knew, especially about ethics and such things; she'd convince you——"

"Spare me," interrupted Westover,

impatiently flicking ashes from his cigar. "The less talk, the better; if a thing is to be done, let it be done at once. I am a man of action, Harrison, not words. I cannot endure that my name should be linked with Angela Cloud's in a doubtful manner; it is a false position—I abjure it."

"Oh, that's the rub, is it?" said Harrison, not relishing overmuch his friend's cavalier rejection of Miss Steptoe's persuasions.

"That isn't all," returned Westover, flinging away his cigar and tilting his chair backwards, his arms clasped above his head, as if racked by some inner tension of thought; "that isn't all. I will be as honest with you as with myself. I feel as if I must keep close to this girl and watch over her. I believe that her—that her salvation depends upon me. There now!"

"But this is fanaticism."

"Call it what you please; it is stronger than I. I am acting from necessity, not inclination."

"It is love, then. You love Angela Cloud, Westover?"

"Love her; no!"

Westover rose from his chair and paced the floor, as if driven by the inner demon. They were silent for a time, and then Harrison changed his tactics.

"Angela is as sweet as sugar," he said; "pretty and lovable too, and all that, but she isn't what you call a lady, as I take it." Then, with sudden directness, "How the deuce could you introduce her to your mother and sister as your wife?"

"That I don't expect to do, at least not yet," was the answer, in spite of a wince very perceptible to Harrison. "I know

what people say about marrying being a scrape. There's the mistake that most men make; they expect too much beforehand. I don't look for any great degree of happiness; I am not marrying for that. I am marrying with my eyes open, and because conscience drives me somehow; I can't help it."

"Strange fellow!" murmured Harrison, sorrowfully. "To be conscience-bitten is little better than madness; and why do you hurry matters up? A marriage to-morrow would be simply indecorous. Won't Angela keep?"

"That's exactly what she won't do—keep. Do flowers keep? Does the cherry keep when birds are around? Matrimony is the safest haven for Angela Cloud. Once my wife, she has protection."

Harrison glanced up comically. He would have smiled at his friend's fantastic

notions of duty but for the gravity of the occasion.

"Don't you think you're something of a Don Quixote?" he ventured. "Don Quixote used to do odd things like this, didn't he?"

"I dare say he did, and I dare say that's what I am; but I'm in for it, and there's no use talking."

Westover began to arrange some papers which lay upon his writing-table, as if to dismiss the subject; but Harrison would not be shaken off.

"Well, it does not seem right," he pursued, "for the disenchantment to precede marriage; it does not look right, somehow."

"Call it the irony of life," said Westover, laying down his papers, and placing his dark muscular hand affectionately on Harrison's shoulder. "Let a mystic

utterance like this settle it for you, old fellow. I appreciate your anxiety for me; but most people moralize over what they cannot help, and are, in this way, consoled."

A tear sprang to Harrison's eye, to conceal which touch of feeling, he said, with a quizzical smile, though his lip trembled slightly under the light brown moustache—

"How would you relish having your wife smile some day over being your widow, as she did this afternoon over being the other fellow's?"

Westover shook his head, and returned to the sorting out of his papers.

"You cannot laugh me out of it, Harrison."

"Oh, Westover, Westover!" cried Harrison, going over to the table where his friend stood, "you are the purest and the bravest man I ever knew. You were

born for a better fate than to become the husband of Angela Cloud. It pains me more than I can tell to see you dragged to her level."

"I shall not be dragged to her level, nor to any woman's," answered Westover, with ready pride.

"You can never lift her. You have a penetrating insight into so many things; can't you see that the only help for you would be to enjoy her beauty, to make a plaything of her? But I know that you will never do that."

"Never!" interrupted Westover. "Play with a human soul? Impossible! It is her soul that I cherish, Harrison. I yearn over it; I long to make it fair, like her body." He threw back his head with a grand movement.

"Transcendentalist!" sprang from between Harrison's set teeth. "I can see

you crushing out your life in order to mould and form, as you think, a pretty child, a fairy woman, that has not so much as a heart even."

Westover glanced at his friend quickly. "Ah, Harrison, how entirely you have changed your opinion of Angela Cloud!"

It was now Harrison's turn to flush. They had indeed changed places since that first meeting with her; but he did not like to admit that it was woman's penetration more than man's which lay at the bottom of this change; he did not quite like to admit that it was Miss Steptoe's restless, feverish eye that had pierced to the core of Angela's shallow nature more sharply than his had ever done; for his thoughts, whatever he might say, too often went astray over the sweet outer surface, with its garniture of silky eyelash, dewy cheek, and dappled hair.

"Oh, Westover, your words wring me!" he cried, with a hand-grasp. "I feel as if I am to blame—as if my foolish infatuation when we met this unlucky girl had dragged you into this; but I never thought of her except as a pretty picture. I am punished for my levity. She is a dwarfed creature; is it fit for giant and dwarf to be mated?"

Westover shook his head gloomily. "We human beings never do each other justice; perhaps I can put some of my purpose into her. After all, souls are more or less alike, and capable of infinite development. It may be that I shall have a struggle; but that is man's greatest blessing, even though it originated in a curse. At all events, Harrison, we must speak no more of this, lest we disagree too fatally." He held his friend at arm's length. "I have looked into your heart,

old fellow, and seen your friendship. Impossible to say how much I prize it; but, once for all, separate yourself from blame. I alone am responsible for this rash act, as you call it. Viewed from your standpoint, it is rash—insanely rash."

"You have plunged into the whole thing through my folly," murmured Harrison, turning away with quivering lip.

"But that cannot make you responsible for my worse folly. No, Harrison; every marriage lacks something—it may be beauty, wealth, rank, virtue. Why yours, if you marry Miss Steptoe, will lack something, for she is a fragile creature; you will have to be Care and Prudence in her behalf when you marry her."

Harrison winced, thinking of the cough which racked the invalid's feeble frame. Then his sanguine fancy showed him how full of hope his ministrations should

be. Already he saw Health running, at his call, to plant roses in Miss Steptoe's pale cheek, whereas Westover's work would be a thankless task. He looked earnestly at his friend, and Westover spoke—

"One should enter marriage with something of a sacramental spirit; it is not so much a new sphere of pleasures as a new sphere of duties. In order to double joy, we often have to quadruple pain. The marriage relation, rightly fulfilled, is the one condition that calls out a man's best powers; with women it is different. A man longs for responsibility and motive; he longs to spend his feeling upon something; he desires to love more than to be loved; because his is the active principle of life. It is a strange magnetism that draws me into this marriage, and yet *I cannot call it love.*"

Harrison pressed the hand that still rested lightly upon his, and they parted.

It was dawn before Westover found time to snatch a couple of hours' sleep. The letter which he sat down to pen to father, mother and sister in the south land was the very hardest thing he had ever had to do in his life. For here the feelings of others were concerned, and these he was given to cherishing more than his own. Midnight saw him with uplifted pen striving to put Angela upon paper for his mother's pleasure. "Women care so much about looks and the things that take the eye," he said to himself; but words fled from him. Harrison had called her a blonde gipsy, but that would not do to go in this letter. Miss Steptoe had spoken of her as Undine, but Madame Westover would have cared for no such heathen titles. Lillehammer had

said, "That girl is born with a golden spoon in her mouth," but such phrasing would not have suited the ear of the Virginian dame, if intended as a description of her son's bride. The young-eyed dawn that was ushering in his marriage-day at last looked wanly through the window, and chid him for delayed duties. He dipped his pen energetically into ink, and finished the letter, which never reached its destination.

CHAPTER IV.

WESTOVER and Angela were married. There was no wedding breakfast, no wedding journey. The sole spectators of the ceremony were Harrison and Miss Steptoe.

"You will let me come sometimes and drink tea with you, Mrs. Westover?" Harrison asked, leaning against the carriage door as the pair were about to drive away, mischief playing with gravity upon his countenance.

"And me too?"

Miss Steptoe gave her thin hand to Westover through the carriage window.

"I should so like to be Mrs. Westover's friend, and yours too."

Her voice trembled a little when she turned away, for she regarded Harrison's friend as little short of a hero. Somehow she affected Westover by her unspoken sympathy. He said to himself, in the midst of the solemnity of the moment, "How much these women who have faith can strengthen you!" The carriage rolled off. Angela had been easily persuaded into a sudden marriage; for she was one of those women whose normal condition is matrimony. Still, she felt something like surprise at beholding the serious Westover, who had never spoken a flattering word to her, transformed into a suitor, and an impatient one; this surprise sobered her, and its chaste effect was visible upon her countenance as they drove along the Denver streets. Had Harrison been the

suitor, she would have been far less surprised; and it is probable that, with him, she would have entered upon the estate of marriage with less of fear, and more of pleasurable anticipation. A pretty woman, however, cannot long be surprised that any man should wish to marry her, be he who he may. She cried out with delight when she caught the first glimpses of the bird-cage porch to be hers, and Westover, fired with the missionary spirit, thought this delight not only pleasing, but full of promise of future development. That evening Miss Steptoe shook her head, remarking to Harrison—

"Mr. Westover makes a mistake; he will see it some day. Natures that are opposed become more and more opposite as time passes; habits may conform, but the inward being is set in a sharper groove where sympathy is lacking."

"Mark my words, Fanny, Nature has set betwixt Westover and his wife a wall impenetrable; no power on earth, or heaven either, can level it; each to the other is a blank. I tried my best to dissuade him; impossible."

"But don't you see, that goose of a wife is never going to learn anything, except from social contact; she is physically susceptible, not otherwise. He means to isolate her from temptation until common-sense wisdom becomes the habit of her life. It is a mistake; can't you convince him that it is?"

"Ah! you don't know Westover; his heart is sound as a nut, but his will is its shell. You could not any more move him than the mountain over yonder."

Miss Steptoe played with a fan and surrendered herself to thoughts. "How he could love!" she said to herself.

Harrison's voice broke in upon her reverie with, "Educating a wife is his last fad. I only hope he may not have to pay for it as most people do for their fads."

"If she were only not so stupid!" murmured Miss Steptoe.

Harrison took a turn up and down the room; then struck an attitude in front of the grate, a smile puckering his lips. He had been grave long enough.

"Ah, Fanny, it's no use to lament—Westover will do his *devoir;* he's an odd chap. But even the gods fight against stupidity and are conquered."

"Odd chap"—this was a title which his friends were very fond of applying to Westover. They all admired him, but agreed they could not make him out. He took no part in organized charities as they did, and yet he had always a string of *protégées* after him. "Why don't you join

the Union Aid Society?" said they. "As a member you can do the greatest good to the greatest number with the greatest possible comfort." "Extremes meet," Westover would say, with a shrewd laugh, "for greatest good supply greatest harm." "But I don't understand you. 'What's the matter with the Union, eh?" "Oh, nothing, I reckon, for those who like it. It mitigates pain; it isn't transforming." "I should call that God's part," came the retort.

Westover had encountered a man once begging on the street. To the petition, "Give me something to get a dinner with; I haven't eaten anything since yesterday," Westover had answered, "Why don't you get work to do? You are a man as well as I am; you have no right to depend on another man's bounty."

The beggar received the reproof

passively. One day, at his accustomed haunt, he looked up with sly sort of eagerness, and asked, "Well, I'd work if I could get it."

"Oh, you can get it easy enough. I will give you some. You can make my office clean. Will you?"

The man nodded, and followed Westover to his office, where he was worked unsparingly. He grumbled sometimes, but was met with the question, short and sharp—

"Don't work if you are unwilling. Do you wish to return to your street-corner and your begging?"

But the man did not wish this. He was comfortably looked after in Westover's employ; he knew that he had found a friend. A year passed. He became a good worker, for Westover would tolerate no other. One day the latter said—

"Rick, you will soon be your own man

if you keep on like this; but you must read more. I haven't seen you with anything in your hand to read yet. Can't you read?"

"Yes, so-so; nothing that's very hard to make out, though."

Westover left books around, and Rick read them in time. Finally, his patron said—

"It takes a long time for you to believe in the truth of what I say, Rick, but you've taken to my last advice sooner than you did to the first. You are getting to be a steady fellow. Let me see; how old are you?"

"Twenty-four, Mr. Westover; but I hope you ain't going to stop giving me good advice, for all I'm so old."

"No; I've got another piece for you. Let's see how you'll enjoy it. It's time for you to love now."

Rick Cardon blushed up to the roots of his ginger-coloured hair.

"Oh, bosh! I don't mean that," threw in Westover, impatiently, noting the blush; and Rick blushed a more vivid solferiono at the implied rebuke. "Love does not mean a woman always, Rick. You must love somebody outside yourself, your own kith and kin, somebody worse off, helpless. Teach a class in the Sunday school, boy, if nothing better turns up, but love—love somebody, not yourself."

"Mr. Westover, I love you, 'pon my soul I do!" cried Rick, in a tremor, and he would have seized his patron's hand and kissed it had he dared.

Yes, Westover was an odd chap, with odd *protégées*, odd notions, odd charities. "Why, he employed a beggar as his office-boy," they said of him years back; but now the cry was, "He has married an opera-girl,

a woman that talks like my wife's cook. What do you think of him? One of the best old families in Virginia, too." But the women all turned an indulgent eye upon Westover.

After marriage he was systematically kind, as he had been before. He read no lectures, did not chide, nor endeavour to shut up the exasperating mouth that poured out such volleys of nonsense, though he did strive to improve the mongrel English, and felt richly rewarded when Angela occasionally said something very prettily. Yes, he was indulgent. She was a little greedy, and liked to be always nibbling at something—a clove, a scrap of lemon-peel, or a morsel of citron. He brought home at night small parcels, for which she dived into his great-coat pocket, crying out with delight when she brought to view sugar-plums or dried fruits.

But he was not all indulgence. There was a rigorous strain in him. He believed that the real missionary work consists in keeping the subject employed. Activity, if it be in the right direction, is the only true teacher. He wished her to be healthfully natural, but active. Here lay the problem—how inspire purpose? He threw out suggestions. They were not taken, not noticed. "She is not ready for them yet," he would say inly, still continuing to throw them out with a kind of passionate patience, hoping that one day they might penetrate her slow brain. When not engaged with pleasure, she was indolent, and snatched surreptitious foretastes of slumber every night in the chimney-corner, while Westover read at the centre table. She was not alert, and yet she had a vague idea that this strange, kind, wistful husband was disappointed

when she spent a whole evening thus engaged.

"What are you going to do, Angela?" he inquired one night in the third week of the honeymoon, glancing up from a book with which he was occupied.

"I don't know"—pausing a moment, then startled into making a plan. "I guess I'll go and talk to Matt." Matt was the maid-of-all-work, whom Angela found a refreshing addition to the husband's society.

"Dear child, let Matt alone. Spend this evening with me, won't you?"

He looked for response, but this he was not going to get, this man who had married with his eyes open.

"Ain't you going to read?" she asked, disappointed at this interference with her plan.

"Yes, and something I would like to

read aloud to you. Come." Westover's voice was one of the very sweetest virility. The chord in it pleased her musical ear; she smiled. He drew her arm through his and said again, with infinite softness, "Come."

She allowed herself to be drawn to the centre table, but shuddered at the sight of the volume which lay open at the place where Westover was reading. He observed the shudder and the reluctant look, and said, half laughing, as he pushed the volume out of sight under some newspapers—

"Do not be frightened; that is not what I am going to read, but this, a new book, a novel. I think you will like it; my sister does."

After this introduction, he turned to some illustration which the book contained, and pointed out several humorous hits.

But Angela, whose literature was strictly limited to notices of deaths and marriages, advertisements, theatrical criticisms, or—her highest flights—blood-and-thunder newspaper tales, such as kill imagination, —Angela, accustomed to this, recoiled, and drew the conversation off on a side issue.

"Tell me something about your sister, and I'll stay. Is she pretty?"

"Oh yes, pretty enough," answered Westover, hurriedly, with a brother's indifference to a sister's looks.

But Angela was not satisfied. She craned her neck so as to glimpse a bit of her own side face in the brand new mirror that reflected the newly-married pair against a background of black walnut—a buffet, in ordinary parlance, of which Angela was justly proud, but which she called "buffoon" when alluding to it under the stress of excitement.

"But," she insisted, "is she uncommonly handsome? is she better looking than—than me?" The eyes that sought Westover's after asking this question were darkened by anxiety.

"Oh, that's what you are up to, is it?" He laughed and pinched her cheek. Beseeching a husband for compliments is pleasing in a young wife; there is a flavour of feeling in the petulance. "No, of course not; you are very beautiful, Angela—so beautiful that I should like to see you as perfect in every other way." In point of beauty a sister yields to a wife. "My sister Gay is a fine girl, though"—with a sigh—"She has many qualities which a noble woman must have."

Angela glanced up anxiously. She understood that Westover did not think her noble; evidently there was a flaw in her. What?

"Is it the mole?" She touched the brown velvet spot, very tiny, islanded in the rose-bloom of her right cheek.

Westover shook his head and laughed a little bitterly. The lady murmured as if to herself—

"Some people say they like the mole better than the dimple on the other cheek; but I don't. I wish it wuzn't there; it bothers me." Another glance at the mirror; after a few minutes of silence, she said suddenly, "Gay is noble; I am not. I am pretty; she is not. I wonder, Westy, does she have lots o' fellows?"

"How should I know——?" he began, trying not to be provoked, then breaking off. "I wish you would not say 'fellows,' Angela; it is not lady-like. My sister would never use such an expression; my wife should not."

"Gol——" began Angela, but broke

off in dismay. "I mean—I forgot, 'deed I did. Don't be mad; I won't again."

Angela felt, quite in her own way, the importance of being Mrs. Meade Westover. She had heard of the well-mannered gentlemen and gentlewomen, his kindred in the east, and desired to be *airi*stocratic as they were. It was the way to be so that bewildered her.

"Come, I am going to show you my new book, 'David Copperfield,' a funny story. My mother and sister used to laugh over it till they cried. See, here is a picture of David, with his child-wife, as he called her. I think she must have been something like you, Angela."

Westover coaxed, and Angela sank into an easy-chair.

"Now for the first chapter," he cried, in an encouraging voice.

He read. At the conclusion of the second

chapter, he glanced around to see the effect produced upon her, and discovered that his audience of one had glided into slumber. He was reading aloud to tables and chairs. The sudden ceasing of his voice caused the sleeper to open her eyes.

"Keep right on," she murmured languidly; then, turning toward him another inch of sleep-flushed cheek, she pillowed her head on her arm and was off to sleep again in a twinkling.

Westover felt a little vexed. Why should any one be going to sleep when the clock had not yet struck eight? He tapped her shoulder.

"Here, Angela, take the book; do you read to me, and I will show you how to listen."

"Oh, Westy, why don't you keep right on?" She yawned; then, seeing him

insistent, "I'm nothing of a hand at reading." The yawn became a pout.

She took the volume, however, and dashed offhand into the first paragraph. Her tongue was a runaway horse, pausing neither for commas nor periods, but breaking down at a leap each barrier of etymology. Ignorance shows itself more readily in reading than in talking; for the ignorant reader, taking no note of emphasis, supplies no running commentary to the matter read. Such a reader was Angela. She called Copperfield, "Crupperfooled;" Murdstone, "Murderstring;" while Pegotty underwent a variation every time that it was pronounced.

"A little slower, Angela, please," Westover pleaded; but slowness cannot supply intelligence, and he was full of trouble—so baffled that he asked himself, "Which is more of a force, intelligence or stupidity?"

"Let me read now," he volunteered, after listening hopelessly through a chapter.

He took the book, and threw his finest skill into his reading, to make it enlivening; after a while he stopped to talk with Angela about the story. She was listening attentively this time, in spite of two suspiciously pink eyes fastened upon him.

"Mr. Murderstring reminds me of Bobby Prentiss," she said—"black hair and all."

"And Mrs. Copperfield—Clara, you know, how do you like her?"

"Clay-ra! oh, she's splendid!" was Angela's comment, with that lack of discriminating power which exasperates the truly appreciative. "But I haven't got much use for that other one Mrs.—what's her name?—Mrs. Rubbage."

"Rubbidge?" repeated Westover, puzzled, watching Angela admire the white-

ness of her arm brought into relief by the jet-black of his broadcloth coat-sleeve.

"Yes, Rubbidge or Rummage, or something like it."

Westover threw back his head and laughed aloud. "Ah! I've got it—Gummidge! that's what you mean, isn't it? The lone lorn critter?"

Angela nodded. "The squelched one, Westy"—dreamily. "Lone lorn critter, did she say? That's what I would ha' been, ef you hadn't married me, for all Mr. Hairison didn't want you to. Ah, you have been good to me!"

She looked winsome, thus speaking, and was rewarded with one of the frank, thrillingly sweet Westover smiles. In just such soft glory did smiles visit the countenance of the Colonel his father, and of Gay his sister. Then, with a merry, boyish "Ha-ha!" he searched the pages of the

book until he found a picture of Mrs. Gummidge. Pulling Angela by one of her curls, he made her look at it as he whispered—

"Is that the woman you are like?"

It was ludicrous—the idea of Angela's resembling the wizened, forlorn old woman, whom Dickens has rendered as immortal as a Raphael cherub. He laughed again, so did Angela; and Westover began to conclude, in the joyous mood, "She has humour decidedly; there is always hope for any one with humour." "How he can love!" Miss Steptoe would have said, could she have seen him enfold the little wife later, and send her away to her chamber, with the words—

"You have earned your sleep, Angela. You are going to make a famous reader of Dickens some day; I shall be proud of your voice, and your language, and

your manners, and your beauty." He enumerated these, placing beauty last.

"And you don't mind the mole, sure pop?" She lingered for this assurance.

"Not in the least; believe me, I don't. What seems a blemish is sometimes the greatest beauty," he said, with a far-away look in his eyes. "Good night, dear."

He read late. "Education is the sum of many efforts; it does the sculptor's work. The true artist never loses courage." These were his last words to himself that night. He went to bed and to sleep, dreaming that he had at last succeeded in carving an angel from an Undine.

CHAPTER V.

POETS are happy, careless creatures. They work off their thoughts into living forms, which they call poems. Ordinary mortals are visited by the sweet hauntings of similar thoughts, but they do not work off the disturbance; it is continuous pain without relief—a mental gnawing. With the ordinary mortal, the fluid of his thought for ever simmers, but never boils.

If Westover could have solaced his mind with a conceit like the following of Heine's, he might have found it a vent: "Upon the pretty eyes of my love have

I composed the most beautiful romances, and on her little mouth the best tercets, and on her little cheeks the most magnificent stanzas. If my love had but a little heart, I should have composed on it a pretty sonnet." He had not the gift of fancy, nor the facility for verse. The world was not for him a spectacle, but a place for suffering in; a reformatory; a sphere in which to expiate the sins of your ancestors—in which to bully your heredity, not to be bullied by it. His first antagonism had been against mere taste and custom; his second, against false morality, and it involved larger odds and greater issues. Human problems had cast shadows from dark wings over his brow and under his eyes. He had married in a fit of fanatical zeal, and he found abundant work in playing mentor; but when a man marries a fool, he must

pretend that he has no great objection to folly.

He began his married life in the spirit of supreme patience, but with, perhaps, too transcendental notions. He would have no frivolous people about his house; women smirking behind white blonde veils, and men discharging coarse compliments from betwixt bearded lips. He had to struggle to keep his bride in seclusion. Friends would say, "You are a Don Quixote, fighting frivolity in the nineteenth century as that half-cracked old duffer did his windmills, once upon a time, in some century that wasn't — hem!—the nineteenth."

"You do not understand," Westover would begin, hopelessly; "we are not ready for what you call society yet. Besides which, frivolity—what is it? Vice

with kid gloves on; it disintegrates more insidiously than crime."

A wild "Ha! ha!" for response, and the words, "By Jingo! Westover, you should have been a friar, or what is it that's so much worse?—a Presbyterian! a blue one at that, with eyes that goggle upward, and thumbs that twiddle to each-otherward, you know, like an old Covenanter. You ought to get me to define frivolity for you. It is the wild rose; the froth on the wave; the foam on champagne; the oil that lubricates the harsh-moving machinery of life; the attar of rose, sweet, but volatile. Upon my soul, you old socialist, you are too hard! Let the world in to have a glimpse of Mrs. Don Quixote domesticated. If your wife does crack her eyes at a man or two, need you mind? you needn't see it."

But Westover shook his head; he was

of that trueness of grain which is revolted by delusion, even if it is sweet. He turned his back on society, but society did not turn its back on him. The ladies, varnished on the outside with a pretty gloss of religion, thought him picturesque in his oddities. The men knew him to have business talents of no mean order, so they forgave his queer streak. Sometimes the world makes a pet of those who abuse it most. Westover, therefore, was allowed to rail.

"Society," he said, "is always vulgar. It may absorb into its mass some elements of nobility, but its ideals are low, its tastes pushed to indecency, a gulf bridged over by respectable customs. It is a mass leavened with impudence; it has only an appearance of good manners; it is chained by necessity; its belief consists in mere words set off by

empty phrases. None of it for me—for us."

This was very downright talking. The truth was, the unreal world was more real to Westover than what we term the actual one. For all that, he was a shrewd fellow in his business dealings, but honest as the day—successful and honest. The words are not often mated, but in him they were comrades.

His friends laughed in their sleeves, and tossed their criticisms to each other lightly, on the points of ironical tongues.

"He has gone and married a queer one," said a young lady at an evening party, she having once set a jaunty cap at Don Quixote herself. "She might be very good for a wife, if you could be satisfied with marrying a picture, or if she could sing out her conversation to you, as

they do in the opera. Fancy her trilling on the words, 'But-ter-r-r at fif-ty cents a p-o-o-ound'!"

"I should say the girl hadn't been brought up, but fetched up," threw in a matron, large and stout, with daughters to marry; an ideal butcher's wife, except that her style is so common among duchesses and dowagers.

"Ah, but she is a fresh, breezy creature," said an English lady of the advanced type, who was writing up the West, and was delighted with new specimens of human nature. "To be s-h-e-r, she rides roughshod over prosody and propriety; but then, she is so independent of men's opinions, so free from caste prejudices. That is just what we want in our worn-out civilization—fresh types that will take new impressions in the right spirit."

This speech made a little stir in the

social circle gathered around Mrs. Jo Tarleton's five-o'clock tea-urn. The English adoration of everything Western made even barbarism appear piquant; for Anglomania had in those days attacked our countrymen and countrywomen as with a chronic migraine. But the English *feuilletoniste* found her opponent in a man from the very section she had so frankly admired; a Chicago man, so simple and quiet that no one could have guessed what his profession was. He puckered his face in disapprobation, as he retorted—

"Riding roughshod over prosody and propriety, I grant; fresh and breezy, I do not. I met the lady you speak of once, by the invitation of a common friend, and I found her to be as flat as the flattest doldrum that ever hung about a tropic sea—a dead calm, no stir in her. I hate

this talk about fresh types and going back to nature. It only shows that, instead of being civilized as we should be, that we are allowing ourselves to be coaxed by the barbarian within us."

The English lady turned hungrily to her opponent, who seemed himself a genuinely fresh type, worthy to be preserved in the museum of her writings, and set off with a pen-and-ink sketch; for she was "awfully clever," in the opinion of her Denver admirers. On inquiry, she found that her new type went by the name of Ernest Block; that he was an intimate friend of Westover's; and, furthermore, that he was of a literary princeliness of nature, giving everything its due, without intellectual snobbishness or subservience to any dictum. He had little sympathy for his friend's marriage, and said so. The men, as a rule, agreed with each other that it

was a monstrous pity that Westover could not have chloroformed his conscience with regard to the pretty little *prima donna;* anything save marriage with her, they insinuated to the ladies, but said pretty openly to each other.

All agreed, however, that on the stage she had been ravishing, and that she was neither an open-air nor an indoor beauty, but one for all weathers and times. She looked well on a windy day on the street, with her hair blowing about her face in delirious wildness; or in church, close to the window, in a patch of sunshine that would have shown every separate freckle, if she had possessed such blemishes. The girl had a talent for dressing, and did not look amiss in the most trying of off-shades. She had been seen on the Main Street one day walking with Westover, and wearing a gown of mouse-colour, with

an old-rose toque on the back of her head, which more than one man pronounced on that occasion the perfection of chic.

Indoors, Angela spent the first weeks of married life in amateur cooking. One day the household of two were starved, owing to a concentration of forces upon some weakly custard or vile sweetmeat; the next, it was surfeited upon a *menu* as gross as corned-beef and cabbage. Of course these extremes were far from salutary to a business man's stomach. Appeals were made to the wife's sense of responsibility. She had none. The husband regretted this deficiency of judgment on the part of his lilies-and-roses; a hungry man has inclinations to ferocity, like the other animals.

"After all, she is my wife, for better or worse, dinner or no dinner," thought Westover, in a sort of grim humour; and

he exhibited the intensity of patience of a strong man.

The scene ended in the patting of a cheek, and in the twisting of the longest and the prettiest of the stupid little creature's curls around her husband's finger. Like a pet cat, she enjoyed having her head rubbed, and her ear gently pulled.

One day Harrison, coming into Westover's office, said rather spicily, "Is any one permitted to enter that Castle Dangerous of yours, in which report says you have placed under lock and key a wife who is both young and beautiful?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Westover, wishing that his friend had waited a little longer before fishing for an invitation. "My castle is a cottage, to which you have admittance any hour of the twenty-four."

"A general invitation means nothing in particular, I have always heard," continued Harrison, pressing his point. "If you have let down your drawbridge, may I come to tea to-night?"

He was eager to know whether Westover had repented his bargain or not, as who would not be?

"Come by all means; we shall be delighted," returned Westover, privately wishing that his friend were a thousand miles off. He would have liked to shield his *intérieur* a little while longer from those searching blue eyes.

At home they found Angela, looking a trifle dowdy perhaps, but amazingly pretty. She was overjoyed at sight of Harrison. A guest was an event in her quiet life, and she longed to show her belongings to some one who would admire.

"We won't have any Dickens to-night,

sure pop," she said to herself, as she bounded down the stairs and ran forward to meet the visitor.

"Great guns, Mr. Harrison!" she began, and then stopped, frightened, blowing out her lips, so that they yielded forth a little whistle indicative of horror. "I didn't mean that." She glanced apologetically at Westover.

Harrison found it difficult to restrain the smile of amusement which bubbled up under his russet moustache. "The lessons are beginning to work," he thought; "she is not allowed to fire off all the salute she wants to."

"Anyhow, I'm *that* glad to see you," she went on, reassured by his merry glance and her husband's preoccupation with the pile of newspapers. "But ef I'd known you were coming, I'd ha' fixed up like."

She looked deprecatingly at her cotton gown; but Harrison, pleased with the cordial welcome, interrupted her with his friendly voice—

"Now, don't go to making a stranger of me, Mrs. Westover, I beg, else I'll quarrel with Westover here for having made you forget old friends."

Calling her Mrs. Westover seemed so funny, and the sound of her new name provoked a blush of pride on that smooth cheek, for she was proud of having married a Westover, for all her lack of appreciation. She felt vaguely that he was far her superior; that he had aristocratic relatives far away in the east, very different from hers; and that it was a condescension for him to have married her.

"Say, Mr. Hairison," she said, "wouldn't you like to see all my things?"

To the answer, "Of course I would,"

she responded with a gay smile, at the same time leading him out of the parlour into the dining-room and pantry with the air of a hen who is conscious of being the favourite of the barn-yard.

"See, here's my tea-set, with gilt edges; Miss Stuptoe picked these out."

Harrison fell to fingering these cups, shaped like valley lilies, and showed such appreciation of Miss Steptoe's taste that Angela, ascribing to him enthusiasm for crockery, threw open a second cupboard, thus exposing to his view another set of china.

"My dinner-set," she explained, with exultation; for possession was to Angela a large part of this world's happiness. "These air handsomer like; there's a different flower on every piece, you see, so that you're never looking at the same thing twice-t."

Harrison would have liked to give extra praise to the chaste simplicity of the tea-set, but Angela moved on, and was now calling upon him to admire a teapot, just large enough for three cups of that beverage, which he already began to anticipate.

"Oh, Mr. Hairison, ef this don't draw the best tea, you bet!"

She blew with her lips, to suggest the fascinations which lay at the bottom of that fairy teapot. Harrison felt as if he were a boy again, playing with his sister's doll-house.

"By George! she has improved," he thought, stealing a glance at Angela, looking a thousandfold more bewitching, with her hair tucked up in a dear, dishevelled, curly knot, distractingly like some of the Venuses—he did not remember which—"far more bewitching than she

ever looked before the footlights of the Denver opera-house."

It was a mild spring evening. Westover and Harrison smoked cigars on the porch while waiting for tea, which, when it came, turned out a master-piece, so Westover reflected with satisfaction. There were three kinds of jelly, for this wife of Westover's had a sweet tooth; then there was omelet, with meat chopped up in it; and a savoury *soufflè*—"shoo-fly," Angela called it—which smelled of onions, drawing each to the table thrilled to the inner man with its hunger-inspiring potency.

"There's magic in the pot!" cried Harrison, amused with Angela's pretty play-at-housekeeping, and handing back his plate for a second helping. "Ah! you have a dish there, Mrs. Westover, that starts a new appetite as fast as it appeases the old one."

He liked to say Mrs. Westover, and provoke with his mischievous smile the delicious blush that awoke in Angela's cheek, when she heard herself referred to with so much dignity. She looked so pleased that Harrison sent back his plate a third time.

"Encore un coup," he said to himself; "her pleasure is irresistible, après nous le déluge."

He had his reward, not so much in the onion mincemeat as in the fact that Angela broke into a lot of little rippling smiles, till her whole face was a-twinkle with dimples.

"I have feasted like a king"—pushing back his plate, when supper was over. "Heigh-ho, Westover, you'll get fat and jolly, old sinner."

Westover remembered some of his starvation experiences, and smiled.

"Now for some music!" cried Harrison; but there was no piano. "Come, I will whistle a waltz, and you two can dance, eh?"

Angela clapped her hands. Harrison, pushing the centre table into a corner, took his seat on it, and fell to whistling, cutting his eyes about with a merriment quite contagious. Westover had never danced with his wife—it will be remembered that before marriage they had hardly met on the purely social plane—he even blushed at the strangeness of the position, as she came towards him trippingly. He strove against the austerity habitual to him, and threw his arm around her waist; but they had scarcely made two rounds, when Harrison cried out, stopping his music—

"The Dickens, West! what makes you so awkward? Do you whistle, and I'll give you a dancing-lesson."

Westover's musical accomplishments were limited like his social ones. He could whistle but one tune—"Carry me back to Old Virginny."

"It won't do," said Harrison, listening impatiently. "Pray excuse me, Mrs. Westover, for speaking so disrespectfully of your husband. You will pardon and dance with me too, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll be your pard'ner," she answered joyfully, dropping into the barbarous pun without intention.

Whistling and dancing assorted ill together, and Harrison soon found himself with only half-rations of breath, which the waltz used up only too soon.

"If we only had some shore 'nough music!" sighed Angela, as, breath being spent, they stopped a moment to rest.

The unusual sound of merriment in the parlour, where Dickens was wont to hold

his tedious and sometimes dreary reign, brought a new figure upon the scene, in the shape of Matt, the maid-of-all-work. She was a homely creature "with a character," and Westover had thought she would make an excellent flying outpost to station near his pretty little wife. She had a foot that dragged; a rusty withered skin; and her hair was combed to the top of her head, where it bristled like an Indian brave's. In every way she was the antipodes of Angela. Her face was one to preclude temptations of a softer sort, Westover had reflected when engaging her; and so far she had proved the most accommodating creature in the world, ready to work herself to the bone for the sweet-faced bride, whom she called "My Haingel." She was cook, housemaid, lady's-maid, *confidante*, just as it happened, all in one; she

laughed with her young mistress, scolded her, played secretly at seven-up with her, and was her humble slave, except that in reality she had ten times as much sense as the lovely young thing whom from the depths of her kind heart she adored.

"See here!" she cried, in her underdone voice, and with the confidence of a personage who feels that she is in some sort *deus ex machinâ*—"see here, Mis' Westover, I knows how to play on to the comb."

Suiting the action to the word, she lifted a comb, covered with paper prepared for orchestration, to her lips, and began fluting a familiar waltz tune, keeping time by wagging her head from side to side. Never was *bonâ fide* violinist more in earnest than limping Matt. She inspired the dancers to renew their exertions; she

did more—she inspired a kind of respect for her barbaric self as well as for her rude music; there was a wild talent in her which made itself felt. She changed the tune, growing redder in the face, but never tiring; for Matt's poor distorted figure was instinct with an energy which could be beaten out by nothing short of death. On flew the dancers. Chairs were whirled about; Westover was penned up in a citadel made of tables and chairs, beating time to the dance with a paper-knife.

"Go it, Boots!" cried Matt, taking spare allowances of breath.

And they did go, until they were fit to drop, when Westover, emerging from his fortress, caught Angela's arm, saying—

"Come, you have danced enough for to-night." His words were curt; not so

his tone—that was kind. But Angela cried—

"Leave go, Westy; let me go on. I'm heving a good time; just this once-t, I'm heving such fun." She tried a measure by herself; she knew how to dance charmingly. For the moment she was conscious of superiority, and she enjoyed this consciousness.

"Can your musician play song accompaniments?" asked Harrison, with tact, seeing that his friend would probably enjoy a change in their programme.

"Yes, you must give us a song, Angela." Singing, dancing, cooking were her accomplishments, and she was showing them all off to-night; she was appearing quite clever. "Sing that Spanish ditty—'Sua Paloma.'"

Angela made a grimace. "That's a chestnut," she objected flatly.

"'Me gustan todos,' then," proposed Westover.

She shook her head. She liked to decline, that she might keep them asking. She was a mountain of dimples.

"I don't know any songs now. He don't like music."

He, of course, meant Westover, who felt too much reproached at this moment, by accusation of indifference to her one great talent, to note the vulgarity of that personal pronoun which she threw at him, pronouncing it as if it were underlined and spelt with a capital. He felt convicted. It was quite true; he had discouraged her music, hoping to lead her from the emotional to the thoughtful and serious. Vain project; for nature is stronger than training.

"Ah, Mrs. Westover, you mistake your husband!" cried Harrison, rebuke in the

glance he turned upon his friend, whom he deemed the most eccentric of fellows, as well as a mistaken man. "He is proud of your voice. Who could help being?"

Angela shook her head, looked down in her lap, and began counting her dimpled knuckles. She felt aggrieved, and she was glad of the chance to show this feeling. Music was her one avenue to thought. Though proud of being Westover's wife, she regretted the days of *prima donna*-hood. She had picked up a little musical gibberish, which she aired occasionally with extreme self-importance, proud that her husband did not comprehend the technique as she did; it gave her momentary superiority which she relished. True, she called scherzos scare-crows, interludes intraludes, voluntaries volunteers, when she spoke; but when she sang, the

spirit of her native tongue went straight to heaven and became the language of cherubs, wherefore her auditors were forced into pardoning her the oft-committed sin of verbicide.

"Sing now, Mis' Westover," Matt whispered into her ear. "You might as well, seeing as you doesn't often git the chance, with all them there books you're porin' over, t'other nights, or spendin' your days a-slingin' of the pots—you that's made to be one of the angels' choir——"

Harrison laughed, catching some of this adjuration, and added, "Mrs. Westover, I swear I'm thirsty for your voice—a case of starvation. Sing." He knew how to plead.

Angela looked from Matt to Harrison, and from Harrison to her husband. She liked to be begged; she would have

enjoyed seeing them go down on their knees, if they had been so minded. She waited for Westover to speak.

"Sing, Angela. Several weeks of marriage, and no song yet. Sing, or I shall think, or Harrison'll think, that you are unhappy; that I'm a brute—that I treat you badly, eh?"

"Will he? Then, I guess I'd better sing," was the ready response. Angela's eyes were not made for seeing jokes. "What shall I sing?" She caught her red underlip with her teeth and looked upward to the ceiling.

"An aria," proposed Harrison, allowing himself to be hugged by a large well-stuffed armchair, and settling to the anticipation of much enjoyment.

"The song as brung down the opery-house," was Matt's hoarse whisper in her lady's ear.

Angela smiled over lip, cheek, eye, and brow at the suggestion. The smile was dispelled by Westover, who said, with something like a frown—

"Not that; a ballad, will you, Angela?"

She softened to the request. "I'm going to sing a song that you have none of you ever heard; one of the sisters useter sing it at Lorette to her guitar. It sounds longing-like, but it's a sweet thing. The first chord is low and soft-like; you must hold your breath to hear it. Listen." She began to sing, and looked well singing. Her muscles being elastic, she made no grimaces in reaching the highest note, but could sing and smile. You could imagine her transferred to canvas as one of the younger angels, a youthful sister of Saint Cecilia, without the saint's fine

spirit of divination; one of the young-eyed cherubim.

Here is her song—

"The moon said to the sea,
'I love but thee, but thee;'
The sea said to the moon,
'Love is life's boon.'

"The lark said to the lea,
'I love but thee, but thee;'
The lea said to the lark,
'For thee I listen in the dark.'

"The rose said to the bee,
'I love but thee, but thee;'
The bee said to the rose,
'Sweet is the bud that blows.'

"My loved one said to me,
'I love but thee, but thee;'
I love him from afar,
As earth some higher star.

"The sea may tell its love
To the fond moon above;
The bee may disclose
His love for the rose.

"To the lark spoke the lea,
'I love but thee, but thee;'
But my heart hides its love,
Lest the lover should rove."

CHAPTER VI.

MATT was the best-hearted creature alive. Had any one told her that she was doing her master a wrong, she would have resented the charge with honest indignation; and yet this was just what she was doing, because listening to the words of the flatterer.

"There's a quare-looking fellow as prowls about her', and stan's under them cotton-wood trees, in front o' your winder, Mis' Westover, nights 'fore it's time for Mr. Westover to be a-coming home," she said one morning, while she was washing the breakfast-things. "Once-t he up an'

spoke to me; he says, 'Mis' Matt,' says he, though I don't know how he got holt o' my name so pat—'Mis' Matt,' says he, sof' like, 'kin a feller ever cotch a sight o' the missus in these days, 'kase, you know, me an' her's been ole friends.' O' course, I didn't say nuthin, 'kase I'm *that* pertickler 'bout the folks as I parley with; so I up an' passed him proud-like."

Matt was not without policy, and though she was wiping the plates energetically at this moment, and then setting them down upon the table with such force that they jumped up again of their own accord, not an expression of her lady's face was lost upon her.

Angela, who had been lounging in the window of the breakfast-room, playing rather listlessly with her round white arms, looked up quickly, and Matt was

not slow to perceive that her listener was showing signs of interest.

"Yes," she went on, acting the scene over again in her imagination, and substituting the brand new teapot, which had just been wiped and set upon the table, for the other party in her dialogue, "I up an' passed him proud-like."

It would have made you laugh to hear limping Matt, with the foot that dragged, talk of looking proud at any time and in any circumstances.

"Lord, Matt!" interrupted Angela, now thoroughly interested in the narrative; "did he have black whiskers, and a cut across his chin, tallish, and stylish-lookin', you know?" She straightened herself to illustrate style in her own person, for the ignorant love to picture forth their ideas.

"Bless me, if that ain't 'him' to a T!" exclaimed Matt, forgetting, in her ready

admiration, that when "she passed him proud-like" she must have gone very close to him, very close indeed, in order to notice that cut across his chin by twilight.

But Angela did not mark inconsistencies; she was too much absorbed with her enjoyment in a new idea.

"It must be Jim Riley, Lillehammer's tenor," she said. "You said he had a cut—it *is* Riley, Matt, sure's you're born."

"Yes, Sir-ee-Bob, that's your man!" proclaimed Matt, fascinated by the proximity of this dear, dangerous Don Juan.

She was not thinking of harm; she was merely wishing to provide her lady with such entertainment as offered, and she felt proud of being ambassador between the lovely Mrs. Westover and this dark, impatient, hopeless adorer, for

she had solaced her life of moil and toil with such romances as deal with the very darkest desperation and the violence of love.

"He looks dispairing-like. For the life o' me, I couldn't keep from bein' sorry for him; such a clever-lookin' chap, too. 'Mis' Matt,' says he, in a cryin' sort o' way, 'does the missus get to go out in these days? Is she happy'"—"with that cursed puppy?" the gentleman had said; but Matt, feeling a delicacy in repeating these words, substituted a more respectful phrase for the wife's ear. With the ignorant swearing is the sign of strength and manliness. "Oh yes, that she does go out; an' she has heaps an' heaps o' close an' things; but when she goes out, it's mostways with Mr. Westover, for he's powerful keerful on her."

"Curse him!" Riley had thrown in, by

way of parenthesis; but this Matt did not repeat either.

"An' then he goes on talking pious-like 'bout stickin' to the ole frien's, an' that kinder talk. It made me feel real bad, fur I'm *that* tender-hearted, 'deed an' 'deed I am. 'Don't you think,' he asked, in the touchin'est way—'couldn't you fix, Mis' Matt, so's I could git a sight of the missis and have a little parly-voo with her?'"

Oh, Matt, Matt! this does not sound very proud-like. There was another little secret which Matt's maidenly modesty kept back. Hush! let us whisper. Don Juan (always a favourite with the ladies) actually gave poor limping Matt, with the foot that dragged, a kiss, plump on her cheek—the first that ever a man had given; even now it burned deliciously into that thin sallow cheek. Matt was

in the full blush of courage; she had expected some show of resistance, and had begun cautiously, but caution was no longer necessary, for Angela came up close to her now, and, bringing her peach-like visage into close proximity with Matt's yellow one, she whispered—

"What did you tell him, Matsie?"

"I didn't heve the heart to refuse him, chile. I tole him as how Mr. Wustover was allays out tell nigh upon candle-lighting, an' that you wuz us'ally a'-settin' in one o' them winders, fast by the cotton-wood trees, an' that I guessed you wouldn't mind hevin' a bit uf a parly-voo with an ole frien', like he said he wuz; would you, now?"

The whole narrative had led up to this question; but when it was put suddenly, and with Matt's directness, Angela felt herself hesitate and blush. The young

blood throbbed in her cheek until it pained her, and she put up her hands to cool it.

"No need to be a' blushin' 'bout him; he'll do very well fur some folks, but he can't so much as hold a candle to Mr. Westover," said Matt, who appreciated in her groping way the immeasurable difference between these two men. "I nuver yet sot eyes on nobody as wuz his equils," said Matt. And still, in spite of this, here she was being led astray by the unaccustomed flavour of romance, and about to introduce a serpent into the Eden of this mistress, whom she treated as a child, but whom she idealized as if she were a queen; for Matt, ugly and prosaic, thirsted for beauty and sentiment, and she longed to drink draughts from another's experience of that elixir which fate had denied her.

"Hold a candle to Mr. Wustover?" ejaculated Angela. "I should think not. Mr. Wustover is a perfeck gentleman; he's an F. F. V. of Virginia," she went on proudly. She had an idea that Virginia was an eastern fairyland, where handsome men and beautiful women abounded, but where you had to be very particular about what you said, and how you said it; a place to inspire awe like heaven. "I don't set any store by Riley," she went on, watching Matt put the gilded tea-set away in its cupboard, "but I would like to hear what they air all doing, and ef they still talk about me, Matt. I do get dredful tired sometimes, 'deed I do." Up went the two rounded arms above her head; her hands clasped themselves into a framework for the glowing face and hair.

"I know it, you pretty," sympathized

Matt, standing in front of her lady, arms akimbo, and gazing at her with eyes full of worship. "I know you gits powerful tired o' them books an' things; but you've got the bestest husband in this town uf Denver, you bet. You kin afford to be rare and proud. Howmsoever, I'm a woman, an' I'm got a s-s-soft spot in my *boo*som." Matt sighed deeply, proud that she was able to enter into the feelings of the hopeless lover, as she fondly imagined Riley to be. "It won't hurt nobody to give that pore young feller with the cut acrost his chin, a teensy, tinsey parloovoo." She spoke in an attenuated voice, to show how delicate the *tête-à-tête* was to be carried on under her guardianship.

"If Mr. Wustover knew, he'd kill you, Matt."

Angela realized that this was forbidden

fruit, though, like the first woman, she longed for a taste.

"Mr. Wustover won't know nuthin' 'bout it," cried Matt, conclusively, glorying in her skill for arranging and for keeping an interview secret. One would imagine that she had had many a love-episode herself, and she bridled her lean neck with eagerness at the thought. "Mr. Wustover won't know nuthing more'n you tell him any quicker 'nor a haingel up in heaven. He isn't studyin' 'bout nuthin' 'cept what's in books and in yer face like. He seems moighty fond of reading things out o' your eyes, so you kin set in the winder an' look as pritty as a picsher, an' show that pore, sad-looking, black-whiskered young man what *he's* lost."

Matt was enjoying vicariously one delicious whiff of coquetry. She felt the

poor chicken-breasted organ she respectfully styled her *boo*som glow with the unwonted exaltation.

"I'll jest sit in the window an' wait for Westy," Angela said to herself, by way of apology.

From Westover this poor little creature was getting tenderness, care, but she wanted more—she wanted flattery. It was as if he fed a bird upon bread and meat instead of upon millet or flies' wings. Her real self was starving despite his solicitude.

It was with a tiny thrill of expectation that she took her place in the window-seat of her parlour that evening. Twilight was deepening, suggesting the intangibility of things and the mysteries of the world of sense. She looked out, listened, and drew a shawl about her shoulders, for the night air was piercing, like a stiletto. A

footfall, then a shape, showing dim through the cotton woods. Was it Riley or her husband? As she lingered to make sure, a stealthy step came nearer, though the figure did not emerge from the screen of boughs. The next instant, a familiar voice, piercingly sweet, floated in through the open window, and the words, "I thee more than turkeys love," smote Angela's ear, and her soul awoke with a throb, for her nature was as susceptible to the sensuous quality of music as the lower animals are to light. She leaned over the window's ledge, for she knew it was Riley the tenor now, and mingled her voice with his. They sang together that voluptuous duet with an abandonment to feeling that they had never felt before the footlights. The stars alone were their audience, sprinkling the sky in swift succession; and Angela, giving glimpses

perhaps of her deepening nature, threw herself into song. You might have thought her an impassioned being full of possibilities, from the depth and from the richness of her tones.

How strange it is that those who possess the gift of song, though seeming to be made up of soul, are in reality oftentimes the shallowest of human beings—oftentimes without sense of responsibility or love, but made up, instead, of physical wants and sensual solicitudes, the body a mere receptacle for the voice, as a scabbard is for a sword! Thus it was with Angela. She looked, clasped in her white wool shawl, like some mild-faced seraph pouring out her soul's love for the race of man. She was a being that one was ready to idealize—that is, when she did not speak, for her words destroyed the ideal.

"I thought I could make you come," said Riley, after the song was ended, stepping boldly up to the low window. "But, good God, Aingy! you're a stunner for looks; you take away my breath. Does that puppy you've gone and married half appreciate you?"

"Course he does," was the answer.

"Well, I wouldn't heve thought you'd a-come to the winder if he did," said Riley, maliciously, leaning his weight upon its ledge and gazing inquisitively into the lady's face.

"Ef you're not more grateful——" began the girl, accustomed in these days to homage from the other sex.

"Grateful!" ejaculated Don Juan, with the sardonic laugh which made him the toast he was with the ladies, for they regarded him as a being superior to their small whims—"grateful! You must give

me something to be grateful for first, eh?"

"Mr. Riley, you must quit, 'deed you must," began Angela, with a poor imitation of the Westover dignity; then, taking back part of what she had said, "But first tell me how they're all coming on. Do they miss me? How's Grandad?" Grandad was the baritone.

"Oh, Grandad's all right," retorted Jim Riley, intimating that he considered it so much time lost to talk of any one but himself. "But *I* am all wrong; I've been undone ever since you got married, Aingy." This was whispered in the wheedling tone, as Riley caressed his moustachios.

"Sh—sh!" was Angela's response. "Isn't there some one coming?"

Riley listened. A measured tread struck the turfy street at the other end,

but it was still distant, and he would have lingered except that Matt now showed herself in the doorway and coughed warningly. This was to be the signal.

"There's Madam Scarecrow," laughed Riley, light-heartedly. "I guess I'll heve to play crow and skeedaddle, eh? But I'm bound to lay eyes on you again, Aingy, my dear. I can't live without a sight of you sometimes; you are the light of my life, you know. I'll drop in again to-morrow or next day. Good night."

"Sh—sh!" returned Angela, her hands clasped upon her bosom; while Matt, on the nest-like porch, fell to coughing as if she were in a choking fit.

Riley turned on his heel, and Angela saw his long, loose-knit figure cut across the road through the cotton trees, just in time to miss her husband as he stepped up the little avenue on the other side.

"Were you watching for me, Angela?" asked Westover's hearty voice, as he brushed past Matt on the doorstep.

"Yes," she answered, all atremble.

"Poor little girl!" said the husband, gathering the shawl about her and pressing her softly against him, "you should not expose yourself to this cold night air. You are shivering. I would not have stopped on the way and lingered at the library if I had thought of your waiting."

Her impatience was sweet, yet he reproached himself for causing it. But she, what did she think? She trembled afresh at the thought of his having come so soon. Not that she cared for Riley; no, she was warm, comfortable, content in her husband's arms, but she longed, with the longing of the empty-headed, for variety, sensation, excitement, something different from the home-life.

She kept wide awake over the Dickens reading that night. Westover read the scene from David Copperfield describing the child-wife's death. He was gratified to see that Angela sat beside him open-eyed and serious. Her countenance was full of trouble, and yet she heard not a word that he had read.

"You see how much better it is that the child-wife should have died," explained Westover, laying down the book and wondering whether it was not a tear which made Angela's eyes so bright. "They would have gone on getting more and more miserable all their lives, for she could not grow. She would never have been anything but the flippant Dora, would she?"

"No," answered Angela, shaking her head sadly.

She did not know to what she said no;

her thoughts being busy with Riley. His hour of ascendency past, and the fascination excited by his daring over, she felt that she had wronged her husband by allowing this interview with an actor, a gambler, as she knew Riley to be—Westover's antitype. It was Matt's fault; she would scold Matt, and would go to the window no more. Gathered in by Westover's tenderness, she loathed Riley. But reflections did not oppress Angela long. On reaching this conclusion she glanced up. Her husband was absorbed in his reading, but her eyes dwelt on his noble bowed head; and then, nestling up to his arm with that yearning for touch which the dumb creatures share with us, she pulled his head down towards hers and smiled into his face. It was one of her rarest smiles, and touched with real feeling.

"She is growing," thought Westover, with satisfaction. "Harrison said so; I begin to see it myself."

Angela did not go to the window the next evening; but on the third evening, as she was watering her geraniums, close to the window-ledge, a voice startled her ear. She looked up, and saw Riley leaning against one of the cotton-woods, his legs crossed. He slowly uncrossed them, and advanced towards her with his ready smile.

"You needn't come, Mr. Riley," began Angela; "I ain't agoing to see you."

"How can you help it, my lady, unless you keep your eyes shut?" was the saucy retort.

"I ain't agoing to heve anything to do with you; you can ask Matt," said Angela, still more emphatically, shielding herself behind her servant-maid, for it was

always the strongest arm upon which she leaned.

"Heigh—eigh! you're carrying it with a high hand, are you, Aingy?"

"I ain't Aingy; I'm Mrs. Wustover," corrected Angela, tossing a nest of curls back from her face in a gust of new-blown dignity.

"More's the pity; it should have been Mrs. Riley," was the tenor's comment.

"Riley indeed!" interrupted Angela. "You're not fit to wipe Mr. Wustover's shoes; you know you're not."

She paused in her operation of watering the geraniums. The water-pot poised in air was a becoming attitude; her sleeve having fallen back, revealed an arm all roundness of curve, like some exquisitely moulded caryatid's. But to Riley it suggested only a pretty little fool, whom he intended to get into his power.

"See here," said he, coming closer to her on the other side of the low window, and gazing into her face with his impudent black eyes, "you must take that back; you owe me something for breaking my heart, like you did when you married that damned puppy."

He meant to frighten her, and succeeded; for Angela's courage was but short-lived. It was not the habit of her mind, but the passing glow, flashed into being from sudden emotion.

"Do go away, Riley!" she cried, leaning over her geraniums towards him.

"I ain't going till you pay me something for breaking my heart. You know you did break it," he replied sulkily.

What woman can withstand this imputation?

"I would pay you if I could," she whispered, yielding an inch. "But I

heven't anything as I can call my own—'deed I heven't."

"Then that fellow as calls himself your husband isn't fit to be looked on as a gentleman. Making all the money he's making a-speculating in mines," was the savage comment.

Angela couldn't help a feeling of interest in this new view of her husband's finances which Riley was giving her. Still she would have liked to be rid of her intrusive guest, only she was too weak to know how she should effect his dismissal.

"I was miserable after you gave me the slip, Aingy dear," pursued the insinuating fellow. "I couldn't do a thing, exceptin' drink champagne; and Striker persuaded me I'd die if I didn't take some change. I went into faro. I know it was powerful onreligious" — he thought as she was getting to be a lady now this apology must

be necessary—"but 'twas all your fault," he sighed. "I was too miserable to pay 'tention to the play. I lost—lost uverything I had laid by, as well as you, my beautiful Aingy. I've come to you with my misery, and I ask you, for the memory of the hallowed past"—quoting from some remembered romance, which he thought might stand him in good stead—"to—to lend me *ten* dollars."

Here was a terrible come-down. Riley was conscious of it; but he attempted to cover the hiatus with a corner of his strongly scented handkerchief pressed to his eyes, out of the corners of which he watched his victim as a cat might watch a mouse.

"'Deed I heven't got a cent," murmured Angela, piteously.

There is a bond which knits actors together, and she was not insensible to

this appeal; its glaring impudence was softened to her by his confession of love.

"Come, come, you are chaffing," began the suppliant; then changing his tone, "Well, I took you by surprise; I'll come again, to-morrow perhaps——"

The rest of his premeditated speech was interrupted by whoopings and coughs and throat-scrapings from Matt, who, not depending upon this warning, was waving a handkerchief from the porch with the vehemence of a brakesman on a car-track. But there was no time for retreat, the master of the house was putting escape farther and farther out of reach by each thud of his foot, which now brought him so near that his figure, dark and indistinct in the dusk, loomed up in the opening vista of the cotton trees.

"For God's sake, jump in at the

window, quick!" cried Matt from the porch, while Angela sank trembling into the chair inside.

There was an instant's pause, during which the two women heard Westover's ringing step in the silent street, as it had been the beat of their own hearts, then in bounded Don Juan, seeing but one exit possible, in at the open window—so near that he found a chance to touch with his black moustachios the white hand of Westover's wife—pitched through the room, and vanished at the door, which had swung wide, as if by magic, to let him into the kitchen, where the reckless fellow sat down to rest, safe and sound and sneering, in Matt's jurisdiction.

All this had occupied the twinkling of an eye, and Angela breathed once more as she saw him dash through the kitchen door at the same moment that her

husband's door-key was heard in the latch. Now they were safe, for Westover never entered his kitchen.

It would have been well had Riley been satisfied with his narrow escape, and desisted from further pursuit of Westover's wife and Westover's money; but this is not the way with human nature. Successful escape renews the appetite for adventure. But the next time that Riley came, he did not find Angela in her accustomed place at the window. He rapped at the panes, whistled softly an air from the "Mascot," and finally the sash was thrown up, and out looked Matt's rough-and-ready visage. She was beginning to repent of their encouragement of this troublesome guest; but a second glance at his long loose-knit, swaggering figure and his dare-devil smile rekindled the fires of romance within her breast, and

made her desire, inclined as she was to shield her mistress, to effect a compromise; she could not resist lending a bit of her flapping, ill-formed ear to his blandishments.

"Mis' Westover says how she can't see you ter-night," began Matt, repeating the message with harshness in her tone, but indulgence in her look.

"Well, when you can't get pudding, you must take pie," returned Riley, with friendly facetiousness, wishing in his heart that Angela either had Matt's sense, or that Matt had Angela's good looks and money.

"I'd 'vise you to be keerful; maybe pie'll disagree with you," was the ready retort.

Riley laughed at the maid-of-all-work's wit. "There's different tastes," he went on meaningly. "Some folks like pie best;

some folks consider pudding insipid. Don't you know that?"

Matt tossed her head; tasting a compliment, she liked the flavour.

"Can't you do nothing but talk 'bout pie. You must be hongry? Did you trapse all the way round yere to confab with Mis' Westover 'bout pie?"

Matt's sneer had point; she knew how to draw on her people much better than pretty little Mrs. Westover.

"Dang you, Matt!" exclaimed Riley, stung into open compliment by this pointed remark; "don't you comprehend that a fellow has got to be delicate with the ladies?" He bowed low to Matt, and she thrilled through every inch of her rusty freckled skin, for she did not often get the chance to talk to the other sex by the flattering dusk. She forgot that she was ugly, and began to think of herself as if

she were some bewitching Winona, surnamed The Prairie Flower. "I wanted to say a heap o' things, but I'll declare I was that afraid you'd shut me up. A gentleman understands that he's bound to keep a respectful distance with such as you. You make the fellows stand round, Matt. Ef it hadn't been fur that, you'd ha' been married long 'fore now, eh?"

"I allays did think you men were the biggest gulls," assented Matt, smiling softly upon Riley.

"Don't be so hard on us—on me, at least, Mis' Matt. I'd like to heve you think well o' me." This was said with answering softness, as Riley wondered how surely he could strike at the mistress's purse through the maid.

All this time the hour of Westover's return was drawing nearer and nearer, and

punctuality was the corner-stone of his virtues. But no one was on the alert to-night, and the wary sentinel, Matt, was herself off duty. She was forgetting Westover, everything, in the bliss of this adventurer's society. She did not realize that she still stood in the parlour window, where Angela so often stood, and that saffron cheeks do not show that they are not rosy ones by night.

Westover's footfall on the grass-plot within the enclosure surprised the twain, and Riley was made aware of the master's presence by a blow on the back, between his shoulder-blades.

"The devil take you!" he cried, turning around; but he was at a disadvantage, being taken by surprise, and found himself powerless in Westover's grasp.

"Off with you, you scoundrel! thankful

to Heaven if I let you go with your life."

Westover shook him once, twice, thrice, until he was breathless, then sent him spinning into the ditch, under the cottonwood trees.

Riley thought himself dead in that first instant, but he was roused to consciousness by the report of a pistol. It was his own revolver, which, protruding from his pocket, had been discharged by the shock of the fall, and had sent its bullet, not through himself, as he thought at first, but through his assailant instead. Fate avenged him. Westover fell, with a groan, upon the ground beside him.

Riley sprang to his feet, bewildered, but possessed with the thought that suspicion would mark him as the murderer of this man who lay senseless, dead apparently, at

the entrance of his own house. For a moment Riley gazed upon him; the next, he started off at the top of his speed. Into the darkness of night he vanished, while the darkness of death seemed already to have swallowed the man whom he had sought to injure.

Riley had not disappeared before lights flashed forth from the house, lanterns twinkled under the cotton-woods, women's voices, women's screams, women's sobs were heard, and the coming and going of men's feet, for ill tidings travel fast.

Westover had received a death-wound. The most hideous events are often, in this world, the result of chance; a life that might blaze like a splendid star is extinguished, not by intention nor by cruelty, but by accident. Upon how attenuated a thread of life does the im-

mortal soul revolve, when it can be broken off by so stupid, so blind, so poor a thing as accident! Westover did not die at once, but lingered for two days, though unconscious most of the time. Harrison, pale and awestruck, came to nurse him; and Miss Steptoe, with tears, begged that she might assist.

The next morning the dying man opened his eyes with the natural look in them. He glanced wistfully around the dark room, as if in search of some one.

"Angela is taking rest," explained Miss Steptoe, gently, emerging from the dimness of the sick-room, made dimmer by the approaching shadow of death.

Westover closed his eyes with a look of weariness, and tried to turn his head upon the pillow.

"Let me help you, you are so weak," whispered Miss Steptoe. "There."

She arranged his pillow so that he could move himself slightly, and then lingered with her hand upon his dark hair, hesitating, as if she wished to say something, yet scarcely knew how. With woman's quickness, she had divined the cause of that unrest which fevered him, adding to the pangs of weakness and the natural disquiet brought about by a mortal wound. He did not open his eyes again, and his profile, cameo-like upon the pillow, white, pained, sad, thrilled her bosom with the pity which a strong man's helplessness always inspires.

"Mr. Westover," she murmured at last, faintly, then stopped and glanced timidly about the room, though the two were alone.

The sick man moved his lips, as if in reply, but did not unclose his eyes.

"Mr. Westover," she pursued, more boldly, "I have waited for you to be well enough to hear me talk a little. I know that you are worrying your mind at times with the events of last night—that dreadful night, when you were hurt. I have been afraid that you might not understand how Riley happened to be here. It was through Matt he came; it was Matt that he was talking with when you came up. Angela had nothing to do with it; she would not even see him. Did you quite understand that?"

Miss Steptoe bent her head to catch his answer, but Westover did not speak. After a moment, during which he lay still and deathlike, he slowly unclosed his eyes and fixed them upon her. What solemn eyes they were! They had always

been deep-set and serious, but now they appeared like rifts giving glimpses of a black midsummer sky, their colour intensified by anguish. Gradually, however, a look of pleased consciousness stirred their depths, and a shimmer of contentment drifted across the grey palor of his face. He understood her, was satisfied, and Miss Steptoe's bosom throbbed with joy that she should be able to give him comfort, a ray of light in life's twilight hour. Blessed ministration. Her agitation made her cough; then she felt her hand softly touched. It was pressed twice, and his lips moved, but no sound came forth. After this he sank into a state of semi-consciousness, from which he only roused when Angela came in, a little noisily. She clung to the doorway, fearing to advance, the figure of Westover lying so straight and still be-

neath the bedclothes that she thought him dead already.

"Come in, dear; he is not asleep now," murmured Miss Steptoe.

Angela breathed jerkily, feeling as if she were smothered by the horror, the dread, the darkness that shut down upon them all. Her hair was disordered, her gown rumpled; her eyes wide with terror, their lids pink with sleeplessness.

"There is nothing to be afraid of, Angela; he will like to see you. Come."

Miss Steptoe moved forward to throw an arm around the shrinking wife and lead her towards the bed, step by step. Dumb misery often strikes us more acutely than intelligent sorrow.

Westover, arrested in the act of sliding off deeper and deeper into that dreary world of unconsciousness and shadows, opened his eyes with a start to behold

his wife standing beside his bed, bending over and gazing at him with starved eyes. He made an exertion, and held out his hand. She sank, overcome, against him, and threw her arms about him. How strong, how vigorous they were! As far as this world goes, she was his superior now.

It was the embrace of health and pain. The wife's yellow curls tumbled about the husband's neck and shoulders; his pinched nostrils quivered in outline against her bowed head, as, reproaching himself for suspicion of her, he strove to conquer weakness and speak. But minutes followed each other, weightily, solemnly, like mourners at a funeral; pausing, finally, at sound of the thud of earth against coffin-lid, thumping back its muffled farewell to the listener's ears, when he at last found voice for one word only—her

name, "Angela." It was a tongue to cut the heart, stabbing the pretty word "Angela" dead, as it fell from his lips. He took up one of her curls, brushing his cheek, and laid it upon his lips; then drifted off once more into the grey of unconsciousness; upon which Miss Steptoe said—

"Come away, Angela; your arms are heavy against him. He does not know you now."

Angela obeyed. Clinging to the kind woman, she crept away from the room, and stole downstairs to Matt, who took her mistress's head upon her own bosom, saying the while, over and over again—

"Oh Lord, but he was a picked man! We wee-men"—so pronounced to give the most delicate touch of womanly feeling—"are a crazy lot to be left behind, and

he to go! Oh, I'm ashamed to be alive, and call him dead! Oh, Mis' Westover, my darlint, you and me is a couple of fools."

Self-abuse was a comfort, because it seemed, by comparison, to exalt the dying man.

In the little parlour, which Westover had been at pains to furnish with a view to scholarly tastes, Ernest Block sat, shading his eyes with his hands. Every few moments he was called to the front door, ajar, to answer whispered inquiries concerning Westover. Murmured phrases were scattered, emptily sweet, in death's face, like flowers upon a corpse.

"He was"—already the past tense, so quickly do we anticipate—"a glorious fellow; he will be missed; horrid accident; a true gentleman. Oh me! well, the best go first, they say."

It was a day that had packed into it the experience of years. Experience, however, to the unthinking, is in touch only with cold, hard realism.

Fanny Steptoe, sitting in Westover's sick-room, and thinking of Angela, said to herself, "She will be born anew through baptism in a wife's tears."

Westover spoke but once after this. It was when Harrison stood beside him, gazing sorrowfully down on the noble head of this man who now could not keep his thoughts together for two minutes at a time. Westover opened his eyes wide with an anxious look, groaned, and tried to raise himself. Harrison kneeled down and took his friend's hand in both of his.

"Ask him if he wants to say something about Angela," prompted Miss Steptoe, from the other side of the bed.

"Is it about Angela that you wish to speak, Westover?" repeated Harrison, in a voice that broke.

The dying man nodded. "My mother —home," he articulated feebly.

"Ask if he wants you to write to his mother to have Angela come to her, instead of trusting her here alone," said Miss Steptoe, in a low voice.

But Westover heard, and nodded again with a look of satisfaction. "Instead of me, instead of me," he whispered.

"I understand," said Harrison, soothingly. "You wish Angela to go to Virginia, and to take your place with your family for your sake; is that it?"

Westover was very weak; he did not answer this time, but he relaxed his anxious hold of Harrison, and shut his eyes once more with a look of peace.

Miss Steptoe came close to him quickly, fearing lest he should have already passed hence away, and Harrison hastened to add—

"Do not fear, Meade; Angela shall not want for protection. Fanny and I will not lose sight of her until she is safe in Virginia with your family."

"Yes; trust us, trust me; I promise," Fanny added, in a distinct voice, perceiving that the invalid began again to wander.

He roused himself at her words, gazed at her intently; then suddenly intelligence waned, the set look returned, which, with the strange, never-to-be-forgotten, heart-chilling hush, told them that Meade Westover was dead.

"Why is it the best are sacrificed so often to the worthless?" said Harrison, returning to Miss Steptoe, after sending

to Virginia the message of his friend's death.

"Poor Angela! she does not know how to take grief." Miss Steptoe strove to re-enlist Harrison's sympathies for the new-made widow.

"Where is she?"—anger tussling with sorrow in Harrison's breast.

"Asleep, at last. Matt rocked her, and soothed and sang to her. She calls herself a lonesome creature, and she is unable for the burden of life alone."

They sat down in Westover's little parlour, hand-in-hand, and spoke under the breath.

"Fanny, your heart is more valiant than your head; a harp of a thousand strings played on by an angel—a gipsy, the foul fiend, perhaps. Who knows?" He smiled bitterly, seasoned just now with life's salt.

"Charity, Clayborne; we have a trust, you remember?" (Harrison remembered.) "We will do our part toward carrying out his mission. Besides, I think she loved him, regrets him, as much as she could."

Miss Steptoe had been far more severe upon the *protégée* than Harrison in prosperous days; but woman-like grief reduced her to the molten state, and she now went to work to idealize every man, woman, or child ever connected with Westover.

"Loved him!" cried Harrison, contemptuously. "Such love is cruel; it might as well be hate. Could happiness come of it, do you think?"

"Happiness is a strange fleeting thing, condition," answered Miss Steptoe. "It changes with the mood; it is half imagination, anyway."

"No, Fanny, no!" exclaimed Harrison, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips. "Do not say so; it makes me feel as if you did not believe in the reality of our happiness — that is to be. Say you do."

Miss Steptoe smiled faintly, and coughed before answering. "Do you know it seems as if nothing could ever be real to me any more, with that brave man lying upstairs dead." She turned aside her head, twinkling away drops from her eyes.

Harrison looked up anxiously. "You have been too much strained with nursing, you delicate yourself; you are too sympathetic, Fanny. I shall not let you dwell on sad things any more."

He drew her arm within his, and for a while they paced in silence up and down the room. Woman's influence was at

work developing Harrison's higher nature. Fanny Steptoe was a good woman, and she loved him; but she had abandoned herself to a kind of adoration for Westover, and this self-surrender to hero-worship had been only partially pleasing to her lover.

"Meade Westover was a martyr to his knighthood." Fanny Steptoe was thinking aloud, and her thoughts touched the name of the departed, the just departed, softly, as if they had been saints ministering to the hero.

"This is not the age of martyrs," interrupted Harrison, impatiently, ever recurring to the same theme. "A man might marry Angela Cloud in a fit of folly, under a spell of enchantment, but deliberately, as did Westover, it was the fanaticism of untruth, not truth; for he was untrue to the traditions of his race, to the blood of

his family. The more I think of it, the more it baffles and angers me. Men are fools when they figure in a love-affair, but marriage brings reason out of this chaos. I could have made love to her, but I could not—I could not have married her. I abominate an unequal match."

Harrison's mother had been wont to say at the first bitter taste of poverty, at the close of the war, "I would have you know that I could sit in a cabin-door and live on my family, with nothing but a bit of middling and black-eyed peas. I have my blood to fall back on."

This had been the family code, and though Harrison had laughed at his mother for being a cannibal, he nevertheless devoutly believed in the prerogative of his ancient birth, and in the name of those Tide-water Harrisons who had lorded it

so grandly on our historic James when the West lay still wrapt in mystery, and the Pacific was a Titan whose cradle was unknown.

"Well," he sighed, after a pause, "perhaps it is better so. Angela could never have brought Meade happiness, but only varieties of suffering. Perhaps it is better so. He passed away with her arms about him; had he lived, it might have been different."

Miss Steptoe shuddered, and Harrison hastened to give a brighter turn to their conversation, by saying—

"At all events, our duty is now with the living." And so they gently pushed the dead man out of their lives, as is human wont.

After the funeral, they set themselves to the task of consoling Angela. Mourning had to be procured, and Angela, looking

into her glass one day, and seeing how unspeakably fair she was in her black dress and nun's veiling, raised her eyes a second and a third time to that madonna image, smiled, and was consoled.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Westovers were of English stock. As far back as you traced their ancestry, you would find nothing below a highly respected gentry; while, in the dim distance, a ducal coronet showed above the modest line of farmers, with its sprinkling of professional men. The annals of colonial days made mention of a governor, two judges, and a general bearing the name of Westover; while family tradition preserved tales concerning a long list of planters excelling in politics and the civil law. These men who had signed the

Declaration, and made speeches for liberty in the house of Burgesses, gave to both father and son a marked heredity. The colonel still chafed against the abolition of entail; but his son had grown socialistic, though it must be admitted that his socialism was of a contradictory kind. In the arguments between the two, Tom Meade, junior, would say, "The States were formed into a partnership on strictly democratic principles—that I very well know; but the Union has outgrown its swaddling-clothes — it kicked them off with the war throes—and, as a matter of convenience, it would be far better if the States in these days were governed by the same laws. It would simplify the business of life, and unify where it is a question of administrative power." Then the son would patronize the father, after the fashion of the day. "Father,

you are loyalty itself. But to what? Sentiment, not reason; fable, not fact."

Let us girdle half a continent with Puck's celerity, and take a look at Werewocomico, Meade's native county.

It is a broad reach of level country, upon which forests of sassafras, dog-wood, and locust break away here and there, and show fields of broom sedge or corn rows running along the line of a fence up to the front gate belonging to some old country house, the whole so hemmed in by inlets, creeks, and rivers, that the only means of access to the county is a weekly boat. Lady's-Meade, the Westover homestead, is square, two-storied, and of that dark purplish brick which shows the effect of more than a hundred years of weather. It faces a creek that twice a day delivers Neptune's message to the pretty little beach that,

like a border upon a petticoat, forms the edge of the gentle green rise upon which the house stands. The greatest flight in architecture is a brick wall, still handsome, which runs along the southern side of the house, and shows a carefully moulded coping softened into warm yet sombre colouring by a century of lichens. The iron gate, tapering to a point in the centre, is flanked by noble pillars, surmounted with white plaster urns, and marked with the Westover crest. A jolly old colonist in the days of King William placed it here, and then sat comfortably down behind its magnificence, and collected revenues, for this had once been a port of entry.

To-day it stands open wide, for the colonel has just ridden through on his grey horse to the harvest-field. The country hush seems only to be made

more audible by the distant buzz of the reapers. It is a beautiful day. Spring, with its swift transition, is gone; summer, with its permanence of heat, has come. There is no cloud on the sky, no breeze in the air, no ripple on the river. Nature is no longer expectant, but satisfied; for the bud has expanded into the flower, the blossom into the fruit. The June bugs, those gamins of the hedgerows, whiz around the tiger-lilies, which, fearless of the sun, lift their freckled gipsy faces to its hot kiss; humble-bees, braggarts of the flower-garden, too drunk to fly, hang on the flower-stalks; lance shaped darning-needles twinkle in the sunshine, like gay men of the world. A weirdly crooned chant floats from a Morello cherry-tree on the other side of the brick wall, where Uncle Crutch Amos is gathering cherries for preserving.

Between a couple of magnolia trees, something less than a hundred paces from the front porch, a hammock is swung, and in this sits erect the daughter of the house, Meade's sister Gay. As soon as you know this, you begin to search for resemblance, which you light upon very quickly, especially when her face is in repose; when her countenance breaks into smiles you get the differentiations of the Westover type. At present she is engaged with a book of some sort, her head bent slightly, so that you get a general impression of darkness and strength; her limbs set the folds of a muslin dress, made simply, with a corded yoke, and finished off with a ribbon at the waist. She is not playing with the ends of this ribbon, nor dragging at her hair, as many young women do, in nervous expenditure of themselves. There is no

futile movement about Miss Westover; she is capable of sitting, upright and still, for an hour at a time.

But we will leave the girl to her book, and will follow instead the old gentleman ambling along on his grey mare. Well might the planter's heart expand with delight as he rode forward. Here was the sight he loved best—wide stretches of yellow grain, overarched by bluest blue, swept by the faintest breeze, which made each stalk whisper gently to its brother stalk. It was an orchestration for the elves and fairies. The artist might have cried, on beholding this expanse of gold, "Let be, do not shear earth's yellow locks; they are her glory!" But the colonel was no artist; he was only a farmer, with an eye blue as heaven's own—a commanding figure, habited in the whitest of linen suits, jogging along contentedly, because there

was no prospect of rain in that fleckless sky.

Under the cypress tree he checked his mare, and took off his wide-brimmed Panama hat the better to snuff in the coolness of this shaded spot; not for one instant losing sight of the serried ranks of wheat rippling in front of him, or the nearer stretch of field upon which the wheat had been cut, and where women and children, scattered or clustered, were reaping, raking, binding, piling. Then he rode on, flinging a salutation to each group he passed—a smile of encouragement to the younger negros; a friendly nod to the elder, with a remark about the weather—all given with a manner which showed that *here* was a man who thought well of himself and of everybody else too.

He stopped at the gate opening into

the second field, to exchange the joke dear to the heart of Uncle Adam, the chocolate-coloured orator from the Neck. There were three preachers in the harvest-field, and 'Lias Pursle, the overseer, declared that they were "the trifflin'est niggers in the hull lot."

"This is a heavier load of wheat than we pitched last harvest, don't you think so, Mr. Pursle?" said the colonel, riding up to his overseer, of whom he stood somewhat in awe.

"'T'aint none of it too heavy," objected Mr. Pursle, in his reluctant way, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "The land ain't no 'count any way, onless it's jest to hold the world together."

The dinner-horn broke in cheerily upon this lugubrious speech, and the hands dropped work in a twinkling, and fled to the shade offered by trees that skirted the

field, and dispensed coolness and refreshment from the very ditch-water sucked up by their roots.

The colonel was a bountiful provider, and would have his way in this matter, somewhat to Mr. Pursle's disgust. For that gentleman was addicted to reluctant charities; he believed in giving when giving could not be avoided, but never when it could.

"This is the way these old fellows used ter act before the war; they had ought ter know better by now. Where's the use o' wasting all them good victuals on niggers?" he had said to himself, as he turned out of the field, wet through with perspiration, on his way to his own dinner.

But the colonel lingered at a distance to enjoy the effects of his generosity, for he was known far and wide as the best man to "wuk fo'" during harvest-

time, and he was never at a loss to secure the best "hands." A shed had been thrown up in a remote corner of the field, and the cook, especially engaged for the occasion, was laying out, on a hastily improvised table, meat-pies, corn-cake, steaming (for the negros love their meals hot) middling and dumplings, while a half-grown boy was dipping up gourds full of butter-milk. The negros, being a social people, love the gathering of themselves together for purposes of religion or of eating, it does not make much difference which. At such times they roll out hymns that are jolly, songs that are wailingly sad; or they make speeches or rude rhymes, gurgled forth in luscious ha-ha's, which bespeak the irresponsible nature, taking childish views of life unmindful of the future, but overflowing with affection for the

stronger, higher nature upon which theirs leans.

Br'er Wesley was spokesman, butler, and steward all in one, a strapping, barefooted darkey, who generally enacted the *rôle* of parson for the negros of Lady's-Meade. He was a Baptist by profession, with a genuine ecclesiastic contempt for the other prevailing sect, who were "Methodies."

"Git baptized, breveren," he was wont to say at revivals. "Why don't you git baptized? Kee-arnt you see, you niggahs, that that's what the Lawd Almoughty and what Jesus puts you hee-ah fo'; else what fo' did he have all this water hee-ah; what fo' did he give you oyshtes to eat, an' all sich-like?"

The oysters generally pointed his logic well, for Br'er Wesley made more converts than any other man in the county.

Just now, however, he was engaged in a different, though a pleasing task, apportioning meat and pot-pie to the harvesters with a rigorous sense of justice, stopping to moisten his lips every few minutes with a drink of butter-milk, and then shouting in his stentorian voice, with an occasional rhyme, such couplets as the following: "Hee-ah, Henery Martyr, come, git your quarter;" or, "Who hab' dis?" holding high in the air a hunk of roasted shote, turning it round and round as if inviting each to try his skill at versifying. "Who hab dis?" he shouted a second time; and then a youngster, watering at the mouth, cried out impatiently, nudging one of his fellows—

"Jacob Neal, go git yo' meal."

"Who hab dis?" chanted the parson, warming up, as did the rest, under the inspiring scent of pork and greens.

"Who hab dis?" echoed the jocular sing-song.

"Unc' Lew, hee-ah's some fo' you," responded a solemn old negro, who had stood first for years both in the harvest-field and at religious revivals. "Unc' Lew, he want some too;" and a huge negro, a sort of black prince who had got his set in the old plantation days, strode forward somewhat pompously to get his portion of the feast.

"Come, chillun, wake up now! Whare's your tongues, whar's your appletites? Who hab' dis now?" called Br'er Wesley, in his most exhortatory style. He felt just as he did when he was preaching, and he shone all over with admiration for himself as well as with heat. He took a sousing drink of buttermilk, and then repeated, "Who hab' dis now?"

"Zachariah Collin, he come a-yellin'," responded a shamefaced youth, sidling up to the table over which Br'er Wesley leaned, a smile of good-humoured waggery on his face.

"Dat arn't no rhyme, no sah;" and Br'er Wesley shook his head. "No rhyme, you youngster, no meat; you hee-ah?"

"Zachariah Collin, he come a-hollerin', den," ejaculated the lad, stung into a readier state of mind by the sight of the rich greasy morsels awaiting him, and acting out the last word of his rhyme by a fearful whoop, as he raised one foot impatiently from the ground and gave a bound forward, as if to meet half-way the piece of steaming pig meat that Br'er Wesley playfully let fall into the lantern-like jaw that was stretched wide open to receive it. The lad's voice was effectually

silenced by this delicious padding, though the heat of the Gargantuan mouthful made his eyes water.

But this was too slow a process for hungry harvesters, and the rhymes were soon exhausted; besides which, the rich steam of coffee introduced a new scent into the banquet, overpowering to Br'er Wesley himself. The laughter had grown subdued when the colonel rode up, reining in his horse for a minute to see if his orders had been carried out, and if every one had enough, as well as to exchange a friendly speech or so with the negros he only saw from harvest to harvest.

"Well, Solomon," he cried out to one of them, "I don't believe you ever will grow old; you look as young as you did ten years back—the year we lost all our wheat. Do you remember?"

"'Members!" answered Solomon, feelingly, showing his teeth. "'Twuz enuff to make de ole marse tu'n over in his cofin, dat it wuz; 'twuz 'nuff to maike de angel Gabriel cuss." Solomon's religion was of an anthropomorphic kind.

"I haven't seen the fields look as they do to-day for a long time, and I think we're going to get through without rain too." The colonel lifted his gaze to the blue fleckless sky, with the benign smile that must have made Abraham a grand sight for those to see who lived four thousand years ago. "But it's a hot day. Have you got enough, boys? And I reckon I'd better send you all a drink of whisky, eh?"

He smiled again as he spoke, being well prepared for the murmur of content that ran through the crowd, for whisky

in those days was a rare treat, and this was an exemplification to these people of the colonel's many virtues.

"I'll send Amos out with a keg," ended the colonel, lifting two fingers to his temples, after the old-fashioned form of salute; and then he rode on.

A shout followed the colonel's retreating figure, started by Br'er Wesley, who laid down his rasher of smoked bacon and cried—

"Ef I gits to the place whar I specs to be, 'cordin to the deeds done in the flesh, I wants to meet the ole colonel, and set down with him to Jesuses' harves' supper, up thar in heven." He stretched his hands upward, as if about to pray, and then there came a sharp quick cry of "Amen."

"He's de pedigreest man in dis hee-ah county," pronounced Solomon, looking for-

ward with anticipative pleasure to the whisky.

The colonel rode along, his bosom swelling with a something of the old feeling of ownership, which he could never rid himself of. When he reached the Morello cherry, where Amos was still at work, he said—

"Here, Amos, I want you to go to the house and get one of those kegs of my best whisky, and carry it to the field, and see that every fellow gets a drink. Do you hear, sir?"

"Yes, sah, I'll tote 'em;" and Uncle Crutch Amos gave a mellow chuckle, and hobbled down from the lower limb of the tree with amazing celerity, seeing that he was crooked and had a foot with a sore that always ran.

Colonel Westover was obliged to pass by the garden on his way to the barn,

where he wished to give orders concerning the sick mare, and he stopped again to enjoy the shade of a live-oak.

Strictly speaking, the garden was not a man's domain, and both flower and vegetable garden, of course, were the exclusive charge, as well as pride, of "the Madam," as the colonel dubbed his wife. But he loved heartily the sight of anything growing, and the gardens of Lady's-Meade were, in the height of June, delicious places. You could not cast your eyes half a yard in front of you without visualizing an endless succession of jams, jellies, of duck and turkey stuffings, that seemed to be measurable by flavours and odours. Straight ahead was the lilac walk, its overgrown bushes now out of bloom. At right angles to these ran the raspberries, the fruit reddening momently under the plenteous sunshine. There

were mock oranges in the centre of the garden; but they yielded to the superior claims of the damson and quince trees, that gave earnest of an abundance of fruit. The artichokes grew in a corner, like an insignificant colony, and lorded over by the bartlett pear-trees, Mrs. Westover's special pride. The morning-glory vines completely overran the cucumber beds, but they had twisted up all their pretty blossoms hours and hours ago, so that you could catch a glimpse of the green cucumbers tucked coyly away under leafage and tendril. A mournful humming rose from the decaying summer-house, almost hidden by box-bushes and passion-flowers. "Oh, Elijah, Abraham and Jacob, hear my 'tition, hear my prayer." This was Aunt Portwine, kneeling on the ground to gather sage leaves.

Colonel Westover jerked his reins after

an instant's pause, and ambled on. Mrs. Westover herself was at work in the flower garden, gathering rose-leaves for her linen-press. Everything around her was old-timey. The parterres represented hearts and stars, bound around by the grey-green of the lavender, or the gold-green of the lemon-thyme. It was a wilderness of perfume and colour—parterres, brilliant with touch-me-nots, just a little toned down by the waxberry bushes; then there was bergamot, sweet-william, larkspur, mountain-pink, burning-bush and smoke-tree, young man's love, that made you think of the smell of varnish in a furniture shop, and snowballs past their bloom, while the peonies laughed out their pinks and crimsons to the June sky.

In front of the house the colonel dismounted, not questioning with any surprise

the fact that Uncle Crutch Amos was always at hand, like a double, to take his horse, or to receive an order, no matter what errand he had previously been sent away upon. As the pad was led to the hitching-block, so as to be ready for the colonel should an idea start him off again in the course of the next hour—for the colonel never walked farther than the barn—he ascended the porch steps, took his seat in the shelter of its rose-vines, stretched his feet on its railing, leaned back in his chair, and *pretended* to read the *Virginia Planter*, which he had read more than once already, seeing that it was a week old.

How long he sat thus he did not know; it is probable that the heat, the drowsy sounds, and the pleasant picture which had filled his eyes, lulled him to sleep; but Gay, who had been on the alert for his

return, stirred herself when she saw him take his place in the armchair, draw it a thought nearer to the shade of the banksia rose-vine clambering over the porch, and pull the newspaper over his handsome, fresh-coloured face. She knew what he expected at his waking. Into his drowsy ear the tinkle of ice insinuated itself; Gay was bringing her father his julep.

Oh, the mint julep of old Virginia! what refreshment it has bestowed upon patriarchs of the Colonel Westover type! Let the gods enjoy their nectar; let Horace immortalize his Falernian, the French their champagne; but where will you find a drink so homely, yet so tonic as the old-time julep? What a blending of Alpine coolness and tropic warmth — delicious union of two extremes; for the liquid that quenches your thirst brings to you renewed

vitality; it makes the old feel young and the young feel strong.

"Papa," she said, sitting down so as to watch more comfortably her father's æsthetic appreciation of the elixir before he should drink it—"papa, I want you to sit to me. I want to make a study of your head. Will you?"

"Don't take an old face like mine, my dear," answered the colonel, stroking his gold-white beard with one hand and shaking his glass with the other, so as to keep up the pleasant tinkling of the ice.

"Yes, it is just your face I want, though," persisted Gay. "It would make what artists call a magnificent study."

The colonel laughed, and took a deep draught of his julep.

"Ah, Gaysie, we are going to have a

first-rate harvest this season; the best, I reckon, since the Waw."

He cared wonderfully little for Gay's talk about art, which he considered a frivolous thing, unless it was a question of the portraits of your ancestors; for the colonel, though a prince, was but a provincial one.

"They talk about dividing the land" (by "they" the colonel meant Elias Pursle), "as if a man had only to beckon, and some capitalist would walk right in and take up the poorest part, and leave you the best. Land is the only sure thing; so I say hold on to your land when you've got it to hold on to."

The colonel drank off the rest of his julep, smacked his lips, stretched himself out still more comfortably, as he handed the emptied glass to his daughter.

"Some day things will brighten" (the julep was taking effect); "Meade will get tired of the West, and come back home. Why not? his home is here waiting for him."

Gay mused, her eyes on the emptied glass, whose rim showed a black border of flies. She shook her hand to dislodge them, and as she did so she shook her head too. She believed that her brother would come, but not to remain, as her father expected. Her young imagination could conceive the intoxication which the West infused into its pioneers.

"We must lift the second mortgage before we can sell any of the land to advantage. Ground produces; hold on to ground, Gay, when you have it to hold on to." The colonel shut his eyes, and saw endless rows of grain; then he opened them in order to cry out, rather sharply,

"By-the-by, daughter, isn't this mail day? I had almost forgotten. It *is* mail day; and your brother always sends the old folks a harvest gift. Doesn't it come about this time?"

He sat bolt upright in his chair now, gold of another sort in his vision from that of his beautiful ripe wheat.

"Yes, it is time to be hearing from Meade. Mama spoke of it this morning. I will order the roan and go to the Court-house for the mail myself."

Gay rose; her father laid a detaining hand upon her muslin skirt.

"Not till the sun has sunk a good deal lower than it is now," he cautioned. Then he too stood up and placed both hands upon her shoulders, looking earnestly down upon her, while his long beard grazed her muslin bodice. "Do you remember, Gay, your brother sent us two

hundred dollars for his last midsummer present. Suppose—suppose——"

"No, papa, we will not suppose; Meade is too generous as it is. We must not allow it, or he will have the monopoly of that virtue, and we shall have none."

She pulled the white beard, and though her eyes rebuked, her lips smiled softly into the old man's face. He suffered rebuke from this daughter only, for she was the pride of his life.

That afternoon Gay ordered the new horse to be saddled; she was going to the Court-house after the mail, she said.

"Be moughty keerful, Miss Gay," admonished Uncle Crutch Amos, as he hobbled up to the front steps, leading the roan by the bridle; "case dis here is a new hawse, an' you don't know him like a book neither; min' out now."

"Don't talk to me like that, Uncle Crutch," laughed Gay, with that effervescence of youth so captivating to age, as she sprang into the saddle.

"Yes, honey; but I disremembers ebber seein' om sich a skeery critter fo'."

"I'm all right, Uncle Crutch. Here, give me the reins. I haven't been riding all my life for nothing; have I, papa?" she added, glancing towards the porch, whereon her father sat, enjoying his pipe.

"I reckon you can manage him, if you are as good a hand as you used to be when you were a little girl, and rode all over the county with me," said the colonel, rising, shaking himself, and walking down the front steps with a lordly air, in order to examine the girth. "He'll do," he continued, having satisfied himself that all was right, with the Virginian's native

connoisseurship about horses and saddlery. "He's well-disposed; you can tell that from his eye, Amos; only a little nervous. Just hold a firm rein, Gay; and be home before dark, daughter."

Gay threw a kiss, and trotted out of the gate, which Crutch Amos held open for her. At the magnolia tree she paused and looked back.

It is heart-pictures such as these that glorify a people. It is the memories of them that makes a nation patriotic. These are the seeds that blossom into poetry. Blest is the land whose strength is in its homes, where flourish old-time virtues, and where simplicity reigns.

Patriarchal life had set young Westover's soul in its groove; and though he had broadened, as it is called, beyond the simpler faiths of his ancestors, still he had maintained their stability and their per-

manence of virtue. He was valorous for what he thought the right, and bold as a lion for truth.

Do not go too fast, Gay; linger. Be satisfied with the wild-rose hedge. Stop; feast your eyes on the blossoming locust. Take a deep breath as you pass by the wild grape-vine, running riot over the snake-fence. Will you ever inhale its delicious scent in all the coming years of your life without the picture of this winsome summer day in your mind?

Alas! the roan flies fast. Is there no voice to whisper you to rein him in, that you may once more, with a careless heart, listen to the chirr of the mill? The hour, the spot, are all too beautiful; for your own heart's sake, do not let them pass. But on she flew, unheeding. So unheedingly we all of us rush

into the great troubles of our lives. We go with exultation, yet we know not which awaits us, joy or sorrow, at the end of the road we are travelling so impatiently.

On flew Gay on her fleet roan. She found time only to fling a hasty "How d'ye do?" to the Reverend Mr. Hoggard, the rector of Evelynton, who was being trotted along in his pastoral buggy. In vain did he lean out, shouting after her; she had left him far behind before he had ceased speaking. Past Evelynton church she cantered, standing in the dim religious light of its cypress woods, and on to the Court-house.

The Court-house might be a capital place to go to, but it was likewise a capital place to get away from. The county-seat was situated in the very centre of Werewocomico. Here the law took its course,

here were its penalties endured within the cosy little jail that looked like a younger sister of the bluff brick Court-house, a stone's throw distant, taking the delicious shade of a venerable oak. For here in Werewocomico, innocent of innovations, such as railroads and telegraph-wires, the law was a slow, benevolent, grandfatherly sort of a guardian that chastised with a gentle hand. Hither came county-siders for mail, for news, political or clerical, or for gossip, the Virginian being the most social of the genus man. In front of the country stores rows of saddle-horses stood, patiently biding their time; within sat their owners, among flour-barrels or soap-boxes, indulging in much quiet chaff, or exchanging opinions upon negros, corn, tobacco, the races, the next fox-hunt, the vestry meeting, the crops, and so on.

As Gay drove up to the Dragon's

ordinary, sprang from her saddle, and tied her horse, she beheld the usual assortment of sulkies, Rockaways, Surreys, daytons, ox-carts, saddle-horses, all in various stages of bespatterment from the mire of country roads. There were the Carters from Kenilworth, the Wormleys from Rose-ghil, the Throgmortons from Throg's Neck, Lewis Byrd from Tarleton Hall, all chattering, sorting out mail, and nodding right and left. Mrs. Wormley thrust her head out of her Rockaway before she drove off, in order to send Mrs. Westover a message about the church picnic; while several green-looking country lads, striding the Court-house wall, settled, to their own satisfaction, the points of Miss Westover's horse, as well as the points of Miss Westover's own figure—but the transition was easy from the roan to the roan's mistress.

The interval before mail-opening was consumed by Gay in numerous purchases. Small packages were transferred to her saddle-bag; large ones were ordered to be sent in the cart later. She was so absorbed that she hardly found time to exclaim, with the ring of disappointment in her voice, when the mail for Lady's-Meade was slipped into her hand, "Why, this is not Meade's handwriting, and yet the envelope has the Denver postmark!" She was too absorbed to observe the troubled countenance of her cousin, one of the Brodnax boys, who whispered to her hastily, at the same time laying his hand on her arm—

"Let me help you to mount, Cousin Gay. It's getting late. You won't reach home now before dark. The colonel will be tremendously cut up if the sun sets with you on the road. Stop; I think I'd better go along with you.'

"No, Phil, pray don't," cried Gay, remonstrantly. "It will be so far out of your way."

But Phil was on his horse in a twinkling. "I have something to tell you, and I must tell you myself to-night."

But Miss Westover only shook her head, laughing. "I shall be home in no time. See!"

Thrusting the letter in the bosom of her riding-habit, she jerked her bridle-rein, and set off at a bound. But Phil Brodnax followed suit; his horse gave a leap and kept pace with the roan, shoulder to shoulder, haunch to haunch. Phil was beside her; he was not to be thrust aside.

"Poor child!" murmured Phil to himself, in a troubled way; "I would rather have my right arm cut off than give her a hurt."

His heart was heavy within him, for a letter had just reached him by that very mail from Harrison, telling him that Meade Westover was dead, and that the news was to be gently broken to his family.

END OF VOL. II.

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